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ADDITIONAL SERMONS
ON
DIFFERENT SUBJECTS.
WITH
THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE STATE,
AND
FOUR CHARGES TO THE CLERGY
OF
THE ARCHDEACONRY OF LONDON.
BY DR. JORTIN.
IN THREE VOLUMES.

S. B. K. M. O. N. S.

ADDITIONAL SERMONS

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS

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BY THE REV. J. H. K. M. O. N. S.

THE FORTY-NINTH OF A SERIES

J. H. K. M. O. N. S.

THE CHURCH TO THE CHURCH

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S E R M O N S

O N

D I F F E R E N T S U B J E C T S.

BY THE LATE REVEREND

J O H N J O R T I N, D. D.

Archdeacon of LONDON, Rector of St. DUNSTAN in
the East, and Vicar of KENSINGTON.

V O L U M E V.

L O N D O N:

Printed for BENJAMIN WHITE,
at HORACE'S Head, Fleet-street.

M D C C L X X I I.

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CONTENTS.

SERMONS I.—VIII.

The Ten Commandments.

EXODUS xx. 2—17.

I am the Lord thy God.—Thou shalt have no other Gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. P. 11

I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. P. 23

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. P. 45

Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.

P. 65, 89

*Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days
may be long upon the land which the Lord thy
God giveth thee.* p. 111

Thou shalt not kill. p. 135

*Thou shalt not covet — any thing that is thy
neighbour's.* p. 157

SERMONS IX, X.

On the Law of Moses.

PSALM cxlviii. 19, 20.

*He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and
his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt
so with any nation; and as for his judgments,
they have not known them.* p. 177, 201

SERMONS XI, XII.

Christ's Yoke.

MATTH. xi. 30.

My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

p. 221, 241

SERMON XIII.

HEBREWS xiii. 9.

*Be not carried about with diverse and strange
doctrines.* p. 261

SER-

C O N T E N T S.

vii

S E R M O N S XIV, XV.

Woman of Canaan.

And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

p. 285, 305

S E R M O N XVI.

PROVERBS xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.

p. 327

S E R M O N XVII.

PROVERBS i. 1, 2.

The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction.

p. 347

S E R M O N XVIII.

PROVERBS xv. 14.

The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge.

p. 369

S E R M O N XIX.

PROVERBS xx. 12.

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.

p. 389

S E R-

SERMON XX.

1 TIM. i. 17.

*Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the
only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and
ever.*

p. 411

SERMON

S E R M O N I.

Exodus xx. 2.

I am the Lord thy God.—Thou shalt have no other Gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.

TH E first and the second of the ten Commandments contain the following doctrines ;

- I. That there is only one God :
- II. That he alone is to be worshiped :
- III. That idolatry is a breach of these commandments.

I. The first thing which the text presents to our observation is that there is only one God ; that is, one supreme and almighty Being, endued with all perfections, by whom all things were made, and are governed, and upon whom their continuance depends ; who in times past

manifested himself to our first parents, and to the patriarchs, gave the Law by Moses, instructed the Jews by a succession of prophets, and then revealed himself to the world by his only begotten Son, and who in the New Testament is called, The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This doctrine, that all things are under the government of one God, is the plain notion which reason suggests to unprejudiced minds. But men, when they had corrupted both their hearts and their understandings, ran into a superstitious belief of a multitude of Gods ruling in different districts. This was the result of vice, folly, slavery and stupidity; for the manifest connection of things through the whole system of nature, the simple and general laws by which they are governed, and the beneficial effects produced by those laws, have ever been sufficient to make it evident that all is under the direction of one Power, to which the universe is uniformly subject. The considerable improvements which learned men in later ages have made in the knowledge of nature have set the power and wisdom of God in a still clearer light, and confirmed it by irresistible arguments. But in fact, this great
Truth

S E R M O N I.

3

Truth hath always been acknowledged in some measure; and notwithstanding the prejudices of long-established superstition, and the menaces of idolatry armed with power, and the great danger and difficulty of stemming the torrent, the wisest and the best men in the heathen nations have ever seen and maintained the doctrine of one God and Father of all; and even though they worshiped Gods many and Lords many, yet they generally held one God in the true and eminent sense, one Supreme and Independent, and other Deities as inferior to him, as his children, his off-spring, his agents, and his ministers in various parts of the world. So deeply was the unity of God impressed in the minds of men, and so hard was it to be effaced by tyranny, vice, and ignorance!

II. The second thing contained in the text is, that God alone is to be served and worshiped.

To acknowledge him and him only to be God, must be understood to signify every virtuous and religious principle and habit, by which a due regard is shewed to God in our thoughts and affections, in our speech and conversation, and in the actions of our life.

To worship God, as it relates to our thoughts, judgments, sentiments, and affections, implies a firm belief of his existence, not a speculative faith, but a rational considerate practical persuasion impressed on our minds that he is the author, preserver, governor and director of the universe. From this belief will arise just and honourable notions of his perfections; and from a serious consideration of his perfections will arise a settled veneration, and that habitual reverence, gratitude and sense of duty, which to Him who seeth the heart is the most acceptable part of worship. This worship of the heart implies a fear of his irresistible power, a reverence of his impartial justice, a reliance upon his immutable faithfulness and veracity, and a love of his transcendent goodness. Goodness is the proper object of love, and the proper motive to it; and as, comparatively speaking, there is none good besides God, who is the Author of all good; so in the same sense, there is none besides him, who deserves our love. This love of God is not a blind passion and an enthusiastic fervour; it is a rational affection of a rational creature towards its Creator, a desire to please him, to perform his will, to imitate his perfections, to secure his approbation,

S E R M O N I I

to possess his favour, and to enjoy his rewards; and as those rewards of well-doing are of a pure and spiritual nature, there is nothing mean and mercenary, as some have weakly imagined, in desiring and seeking them. The best of men have had these rewards before their eyes; and even of the Lord Jesus, the author of our Salvation, of him it is said that he endured afflictions and sufferings for the sake of the joy which was set before him.

The worship of God implies also a suitable and visible confession of our inward affections. It is our duty not only to have a constant sense of God upon our minds, but to honour him also before men, and industriously to promote the knowledge of him, and of his holy will, and the love of virtue and of truth. We are obliged to make profession of our faith, though it may be detrimental to our present interest, as undoubtedly it will sometimes be, even in peaceful times and in Christian nations.

We are obliged to speak reverently of God upon all occasions, and to worship him in public as in private, and above all to honour him by our moral conduct, without which the rest is formal grimace and grave hypocrisy. The sacrifice truly acceptable to God is that which

St. Paul elegantly styles, The presenting ourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. Other things indeed there are which must not be left undone, and the worship of God is by no means to be neglected: but the great end and design of all is the uniform and constant practice of righteousness.

III. The third thing to be considered is, that idolatry is a breach of this great and fundamental commandment.

It will be proper, before we proceed to the several kinds of idolatry, to examine and settle the true notion of idolatry or false worship, in its largest sense.

Idolatry then is the paying religious worship, and directing acts of devotion to other beings besides God, upon a supposition that they are able to do us good or harm, and that they are entitled to such adoration.

It is worshipping them, either against the command of God, or without his command or permission.

Let us now examine this idolatry by the light of nature, by the Jewish dispensation, and by the Gospel.

By

S E R M O N I.

By the light of nature we are very certain of two great truths, of our own existence, and of the existence of one Creator, of the God and Father of all. We are also certain that we ought to worship and serve him.

By the same light it appears extremely probable that besides us men, and the God and Father of all, there are other beings superior to us, and inferior to God; and with this notion ancient and general ^a tradition agrees in supposing beings called Angels, good Demons, and celestial Spirits.

But whether these beings are employed by the Almighty as governors of this world, whether they concern themselves in human affairs, and whether they act as mediators between God and us, this is a point about which human reason is absolutely silent, and which can only be known by miracles, and by a revelation.

Consequently the Pagans were not excusable in worshipping such sort of beings as inferior

^a Hesiod says, that there are thirty thousand of them:

Τρεῖς γὰρ μύριοι εἰσὶν ἐπὶ χθονὶ πρυμνοί τε καὶ ἄνθρωποι.

Ἀθάνατοι Ζηνὸς, φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Οἱ γὰρ φυλάσσουντι δίκας καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα,

Ἥεα ἰσσομένοι, πάνη φοινῶτες ἐπ' αἶαν.

Egy. 252.

and mediating Gods, since they had no certainty that God had permitted or appointed it, and since they had much reason to question it, because they had no revelation concerning it. Their pretended revelations and miraculous interpositions of that kind were possibly the tricks of evil spirits, but more probably the impostures of evil men.

In the Jewish religion, God particularly guarded his people against this sort of idolatry. He informed them that there were ministring Spirits, or Angels, who executed his commands, but he did not permit the Jews to worship them; he confined religious worship to himself alone.

It is true that in the Old Testament, mention is made of a person, who is sometimes called God, and sometimes the Angel or the Messenger of God; and the ancient Christians, by comparing the Old with the New Testament, were of opinion that this person was the Word of God, or the Son of God, who acted as a Minister and a Mediator between God and men before his incarnation. But then under the dispensation of the Law, he did not act in his own person and character, but either in the name of God whom he represented and personated,

sonated, or as an Angel and a servant of God, and so claimed at that time no religious worship to himself.

In the New Testament the doctrine of the unity of God is likewise established and confirmed. Though there be Gods many and Lords many, saith St. Paul, improperly or falsely so called, yet to us, to us Christians, there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.

There is therefore a religious worship due to the God and Father of all, and plainly due to him alone; and that is to acknowledge him to be what he alone is, the God and Father, the Author, the first Cause of all; and we are directed to address ourselves to him in the name of his Son.

Monstrous and abominable have been the doctrines of some Heretics in the earlier ages of Christianity, if we may credit the accounts which the Fathers of the Church have given us of them. But we have seen in this century a system of religion, which for obscenity and blasphemy equals any thing that stands upon record. I mean that of Zinzendorf and his besotted followers. These men, amongst other

other detestable tenets, maintain that the God and Father of all is not to be honoured, and that all religious worship must be directed only to Christ, and terminate in him, as in the supreme object of adoration.

God alone is to be worshiped and served, in opposition to all false Gods; but he himself hath made the exception, with relation to his own Son, who is in the Father and the Father in him; and the exception is expressed in the New Testament, and in these words:

Jesus said unto his disciples, after his resurrection, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. And he blessed them, and he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven; and they worshiped him.

God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There are several kinds and degrees of idolatry, which shall now be considered.

Idolatry consists in setting up idol Gods in opposition to the true God, or in conjunction with

with him; or in worshiping the true and only God himself in an idolatrous manner, and representing him under visible images; or lastly in worshiping him after a manner which he hath forbidden, and in applying to him through imaginary and false mediators, in diminution of the honour due to Jesus Christ.

^a The first and highest degree of idolatry is mixed with atheism, when men, totally casting off the belief of the true God, set up in opposition to him some ^b Phantom of their own, if not as a direct object of worship, yet at least as the only deity which they acknowledge, and the first Cause to which they ascribe all the great effects which are indeed the bountiful gifts of God to mankind, and the propitious effects of his supreme government. Of this kind are the notions which some profane men have framed to themselves, of Nature, Fate, Fortune, Necessity, Chance, and the like, to which they ascribe the beauty, order, regularity, and preservation of the world.

^a S. Clarke, *Serm. I. and II.*

^b Such is the *Fortuna gubernans*, and the *Vis abdita quadam* of *Lucretius*.

This idolatrous atheism was not the first kind of idolatry which infected the earth, but it arose afterwards along with philosophical speculations, and it hath continued up and down ever since; and to this class perhaps belong most of those who argue against revealed religion, and who call themselves Deists. They talk much of God, and they pretend to believe in God; but when you come to examine their notions on this fundamental article of religion, you will find that their God is a mere machine, a slave to necessity, who hath no regard to the behaviour of men, and is little different from Nature and Fate.

The ancient idolaters, bad as they were, yet were not so unreasonable and absurd as these atheistical half-philosophers. The old idolaters, looking up no higher than to the sensible and visible causes of good things which they enjoyed, worshiped the sun, moon, and stars, and various parts of the earth, as the authors of blessings of which they were undoubtedly the instruments. This, I say, was less stupid and perverse than to attribute the cause of all things to mere names and nothings, to powers which lodge no where but in the heads of foolish and conceited men, who pretend to be
wiser

wiser than others. And yet the adoration of the host of heaven, of the most beautiful and resplendent part of the universe, was a folly without a sufficient excuse even in the dark times of Pagan ignorance. Reason itself, that lamp of God, without borrowing assistance from the light of Revelation, was sufficient to lead men from the wonderful structure and harmonious motions of lifeless matter to the knowledge of an intelligent Cause; the day and the night, the heavens and the earth, proclaiming the eternal divinity of their Author.

When the children of men had corrupted this natural knowledge of God, idolatry spread itself into a variety of branches. Some worshiped the sun, moon, and stars, struck with their beauty and utility; others adored dead men, warriors, princes, founders of empires, inventors of arts, and civilizers of society; and this latter was the idolatry of the Greeks and Romans, who indeed were wise, polite, learned, and ingenious people, but as to their public and popular religion, little better than the meanest savages, and adhering to traditions which had been delivered to them from their rude and ignorant ancestors.

The

The next kind of idolatry is to set up fictitious Gods, not indeed totally in exclusion of the true God, but in conjunction with him. Such was that of those Pagans who acknowledging one supreme God and Father, yet worshiped along with him many inferior and imaginary Gods. Such was the idolatry of the Jews in the time of their Judges and Kings ; for the people of Israel and Judah, even when they were most corrupted, do not seem to have absolutely and entirely renounced the God of their fathers. They worshiped him, and they worshiped false Gods with him and besides him.

A third sort or degree of idolatry is when men worship indeed the true God, and him only, but yet after an idolatrous manner, representing him under visible images. God is a spirit, and it is the greatest indignity imaginable to conceive that he who made all things can be represented under any form, shape, or image of any creature whatsoever. To describe God, the invisible author of all, under the likeness of the sun or moon, those useful and beautiful parts of the creation, is a folly, but yet it is a folly to which in the days of blind ignorance there was a temptation ;

and as man is the noblest visible object, and the only rational object of our senses in the creation, it is not strange that weak minds should have delineated God under an human similitude: but that men should have represented the divine nature, or any of their deities under the likeness of a beast, a bird, a fish, an insect, a post or a stone, this is an infatuation which might seem incredible, if the old monuments of profane history did not shew that several nations were guilty of it; and if sacred history did not inform us that the Israelites in the wilderness worshiped the image of a Calf, and called it The Lord their God who brought them out of Ægypt. Afterwards Jeroboam caused Israel to sin in the same manner, by setting up Calves in Dan and Bethel, as representatives of the God of heaven, who had commanded himself to be worshiped at Jerusalem, in the Temple, and without any image.

The additional light of the gospel was more than sufficient to clear the Christian Church, at least, from such sort of idolatry: but the Church of Rome hath fallen little short of these gross corruptions. She consecrates and adores pictures and images of God the Father almighty, in direct opposition to the second
com-

commandment, and established long ago an image-worship exactly parallel to Pagan superstition; and is forced still, in these more enlightened times, to support and defend innovations introduced in the darkest ages by enthusiastic, ignorant, bold and profligate men; for this is the true character of those who first brought image-worship into the Church of Christ. Though this idolatrous practice began to exert itself in calamitous, illiterate, and superstitious times, yet it appeared even then so absurd and shocking to the better sort, that it met with a very long and violent opposition, both in the East and in the West, before it could prevail and prosper.

Another species of idolatry is, when God is worshiped in a way which he hath forbidden, and through false mediators. God commanded the Jews not only to worship him alone, but to pay him public worship after a certain prescribed manner, and in certain times and places; and they who neglected and violated these rites and ceremonies were looked upon as departers from God, and ranked along with idolaters. God also appointed a sort of mediators between himself and the people. Moses performed this office, and then Aaron, and the High-priests in succession.

succession. The people were not permitted to burn incense, to offer sacrifices, to bless the congregation, and to invade any part of the priesthood; and faults of this kind were severely and sometimes miraculously punished. These were types and figures and fore-runners of that one great High-priest and Mediator, who was to be revealed, who when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us. There is to us Christians one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

Hence it follows that the worship which so many Christians pay to Angels, to Saints, to Images, to Bones, and Reliques, and to the blessed Virgin, whom they style Our Lady, and the Mother of God, and the Queen of heaven, is really a false worship hardly distinguishable from idolatry. When it is said, by way of excuse, that they worship these only as mediators, that alters the case very little, since to apply to a false mediator is as much a departure from Jesus Christ our only advocate, as to worship a fictitious Deity is withdrawing our faith and allegiance from the true God. St. Paul saith expressly; Let no man beguile

you of your reward by a voluntary humility and worshipping of Angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind, and not holding the head, which is Christ. Thus he forewarned Christians; but the worshipping of Angels and Saints, as mediators, crept into the Church about four hundred years afterwards, and hath continued ever since, in defiance of his admonitions, and against the whole tenour of the sacred writings.

These are the several sorts of idolatry, properly so called, and in the literal sense. But there are several other transgressions, which as they are a departure from God and from our duty to him, and a reliance upon wrong objects, are represented as idolatrous practices, idolatrous in a figurative and spiritual sense.

When a general corruption had infected the Christian world, when the Church domineered over the State, and made laws contrary to those of the Gospel; when Popes and Papal Councils claimed infallibility and absolute dominion over the soul and body, then they who obeyed these tyrants, and exchanged their Christian liberty for a worse than Egyptian bondage, were guilty of a folly and a fault which might
4 justly

justly be called idolatry, and which in the prophetic parts of scripture is called Worshipping the Beast and the Image of the Beast.

Again; When persons having no practical sense of religion, no fear and no love of God, place their whole trust in the riches and the power of this present world, they are idolaters in the figurative sense. Covetousness, says St. Paul, is idolatry, and the covetous man is an idolater. He chargeth them who are rich in this world not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God. So because very vitious and debauched persons are wholly intent upon gratifying their sensual inclinations, the same Apostle represents these also as figurative idolaters, whose God is their Belly.

Lastly, they justly deserve to be ranked amongst figurative idolaters, who are devoted slaves to the Great and Powerful, and to their own selfish views; who sacrifice to these Masters, not only their time, but their honour, their conscience, and their religion, and are willing to be employed in the most disingenuous and dishonest transactions, and all for the sake of lucre and advancement. They also whose views are altogether wordly, who rely upon their own abilities, and trust in the aid

of mortal creatures, forgetting their duty to God, and their dependence upon him, are represented in the Scriptures as no better than idolaters. The Scripture says, Cursed be he that maketh a graven image and worshipeth it: the same Scripture says, Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh the flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.

These are the several kinds of idolatry, both literal and figurative.

Upon the whole we may observe, first, that though idolatry is a crime generally disowned, yet it is very apt to spring up where superstition is encouraged, and ignorance prevails. Thus it grew upon the people of Israel and Judah, and thus it crept into the Church of Christ.

We may observe, secondly, that Idolatry is most pernicious in its effects and consequences. Amongst the Pagans it was attended with a suitable worship, and their false Gods were honoured with ridiculous, impure, and cruel rites and ceremonies. Amongst Christians, the worship of Angels, Saints, Images, Reliques, and the consecrated Bread, was established and maintained by a thousand lying miracles and vile impostures, and by the utmost violence

and inhumanity. St. Jerom, describing the temper and genius of the most considerable nations in his days, says of the Romans, that their character was, to be proud and credulous. If it was so then, it hath been so since; the Roman Church hath been remarkable for insolence and superstition, and hath shed more Christian blood, and made more Martyrs, than all the Heathen persecutions put together.

Let us be thankful that we are free from such bondage, and permitted and exhorted to worship God, and to worship him in spirit and in truth.

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And as we thank'd them we are free from
such bondage, and persecuted and allowed to
worship God and to worship him in their mind
in freedom, and without any such bondage
as was in the Heathen, and in the Roman
Church.

It is the same, and so it is in the work
of the Spirit in the hearts of men, that
not to be of the flesh, but to be
counted in the presence of God.
The Spirit of God is the Spirit of
the Father, and the Spirit of the Son.
The Spirit of the Father is the Spirit of
the Son, and the Spirit of the Son is
the Spirit of the Father. The Spirit of
the Father is the Spirit of the Son, and
the Spirit of the Son is the Spirit of the
Father. The Spirit of the Father is the
Spirit of the Son, and the Spirit of the
Son is the Spirit of the Father.

S E R M O N II.

Exodus xx. 5, 6.

I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

THE threatening contained in these words hath an appearance of great severity, not to say, of injustice; and it seems also to be contradicted in the Prophecies of Ezechiel, where God says, The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. I shall therefore endeavour to illus-

and explain the text, and at the same time shew that these passages of Scripture are not inconsistent: after which I will proceed, by way of inference, to consider how far these promises and threatnings concern all persons in all times.

But first it is necessary to make some general remarks upon the promises and the threatnings of God.

1. When God promiseth a blessing, though no special condition should be mentioned, yet a condition is always understood, that the persons concerned be, in the main, dutiful and obedient. Else, if they notoriously transgress, the promise becomes void, and God may perform it or not, according to his own good pleasure and wisdom.

2. Whatsoever God promiseth upon certain conditions, that he must perform, if the condition be performed. When we say that he must perform it, the meaning is that it suits with his nature, and his perfections, and that they require it. As the perfections of God are proposed to us for our imitation, so whatsoever is good in us is ascribed to him in the most eminent manner, and highest degree. Now it is universally agreed that amongst men,

men, a lawful promise ought to be fulfilled where there is no just impediment.

3. And yet of all God's promises relating to the present state, it must be understood that they shall be fulfilled usually, or for the most part, but not particularly and universally. Such kind of exceptions must be understood, because the history of the Old Testament shews it in many places, and because the nature of things plainly requires it; for it is impossible that men should receive in this life, and whilst they dwell in society, in an exact proportion to their deeds.

4. The two observations last mentioned are founded, the one upon reason, the other upon fact, and yet they seem to contradict each other; and some method must be found to reconcile them. What God promised to the Jews, that he did not perform; he did not perform it perpetually and without exception. The Jews soon became sensible of this difficulty, and hence arose the old complaint that a sufficient difference was not made between the righteous and the wicked, not such a difference as might have been expected from God's promises and threatnings. But this inequality of Providence was an earnest and an indication

tion which God gave to men, that his dispensations towards them were not confined to this narrow scene, nor shut up within the short bounds of human life, but that there should be another state, and a future time, in which all such defects should be rectified. This is the inference which wise men ought to have made; and probably good men did make the inference, and looked upon it as certain, or as highly probable, to say the least.

Still it may be objected that thus the promise is not exactly fulfilled. Yet if it be fulfilled in a more excellent sense than the words seem to import, if not only an equivalent, but a much greater thing be given, no wrong surely is done to the receiver. He who promiseth a small pension, and instead of it gives a considerable estate, is not guilty of breaking his promise.

5. When God threatens, he still remains free to punish or not, according as his wisdom shall direct. This condition is always to be understood, that he will do it, if he thinks fit; and his veracity is not concerned in the

* The first threat that God denounced, was not executed strictly, and according to the letter; In the day that thou transgressedst, thou shalt die.

execution

execution of his threats. So that though there is always just cause and great reason to expect that they will be fulfilled, yet there is no cause and reason to account God to be inconstant and changeable, if he should not execute them. There is this plain difference between promises and threatnings, that by promising, God enters into a covenant, and becomes in a certain sense and manner a debtor; and he who answereth the conditions, hath a claim to the promise and to the reward: but when God threatens, the transgressor surely hath no right, any more than he can have a desire, to require punishment; and if God exert not his right, none is wronged.

6. When God threatens, though no condition be named, yet there is one usually understood, upon which the threatned evil may be avoided; and that is repentance and amendment, which, as the history of the Old Testament shews, often reversed a seemingly irreverfible sentence.

7. Lastly, God sometimes confirmed his threatnings as well as his promises by an oath; which shewed that the decree was fixed and ratified, and that no human behaviour could change it.

To these general remarks one more is to be added, namely, that there are sometimes some divine promises which are providential and prophetic, founded upon the foreknowledge of God, and relating to that order and course of things which he hath decreed; and these are not alterable by any thing that men can do.

These remarks will be of use to illustrate and explain the text. I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments: on which words I observe;

I. To punish the son for the iniquity of the father, by depriving him of any thing to which he hath a right, and to which the avenger hath no right, be it life, or health, or liberty, or property, or reputation, is of itself an unjust thing. I shall not go about to prove what is so extremely manifest. No man can be made a sinner purely by the fault of another, any more than he can be made personally righteous by the obedience of another. God by his prophets hath declared that to punish the innocent

cent for the guilt of their ancestors is an unequal way of proceeding. Yet many nations have been guilty of it, and most nations, in cases of treason, do something that at first sight looks like it. God expressly forbids it in Deuteronomy, where he gives this law; The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

There were perhaps nations in the time of Moses, which had laws or customs, such as the Persians and * Macedonians afterwards had, by

* This appeared so unreasonable to Alexander, that he abolished the custom, though he was of an arbitrary and tyrannical disposition, which his power and his success contributed to increase. *2. Curtius, viii. 8.*

In China, they punish the parents for the faults of their children. This was also a custom in Peru, says Garcilasso. It is taken from despotic notions. *Montesquieu, L'Esprit des Loix, vi. 20.*

Diodorus Siculus says that the Egyptian kings condemned to the mines their captives and criminals, and those at whom they were offended; and sometimes their families also and their relations. *L. i.*

Plato expressly forbids that children should suffer for the faults of their parents. *De Leg. ix. p. 855. Ed. Steph.*

Ne irascamur inimicorum et hostium liberis. Inter Syllanæ crudelitatis exempla est, quod a republica liberos proscriptorum submovit. Nihil est iniquius quam aliquem heredem paterni odii fieri. Seneca De Ira, ii. 34.

which

which if a man conspired against the king, all his relations were put to death. In the second book of Kings, it is recorded that Amaziah slew the servants which had slain the king his father; but the children of the murderers he slew not, according to that which is written in the book of the Law of Moses.

Yet it is not to be supposed that even the most arbitrary princes and the most barbarous nations in acting thus intended directly and immediately to punish the innocent; but they pretended doubtless, as an excuse for it, that the security of the government required such severity, and that it was with a design to punish the offender and to afflict him the more grievously, that they destroyed his family: for if a private man amongst them had taken such sort of revenge, they would have accounted him a murderer.

In the mildest and the best ordered governments, in cases of treason, children suffer for the fault of the fathers. But nothing is taken from them to which they have a claim. For no person in civil society hath a right to ho-

* Cicero justifies such procedures, and yet with some reluctance.

Nec vero me fugit, quam sit acerbum, parentium scelera filiorum poenis lui. Epist. ad Brutum xii. et xv. p. 130. 138.

nours and estates upon other terms than such as are consistent with the public good, nor could he possess them without the aid and protection of society. So that the government only takes back its own. And yet, even in this case, strict justice borders upon hard severity, and some degree of clemency seems more commendable.

The Roman History affords us a remarkable instance relating to this point. When Cassius, a man in high station, had conspired against Marcus Aurelius, his Emperor, and his friend and benefactor, the revolt was soon quashed, and Cassius was slain by his own soldiers. Upon this occasion, the Emperor, who would certainly have perished if his enemies had prevailed, yet forgave those who had been engaged in the rebellion, and took the wife and children of Cassius under his protection, and desired the Senate to forgive them, or rather, said he, to treat them as persons entirely innocent; since not they, but Cassius was the offender.

Now we may ask any one whether this behaviour of the Emperor did him honour. All the Historians, ancient and modern, who have related the fact, agree in commending the lenity

lenity and the good nature of this excellent Prince.

In the ^a poetical and popular religion of the Pagans, this conduct of punishing the children for the fathers is perpetually ascribed to the Gods, and they are represented as striking awry in their rage and resentment, and revenging themselves upon the innocent for the faults of others. And as it was not pretended that the Gods ever made a compensation to the harmless sufferers, or that the sufferers deserved it upon other accounts, this was representing the Deities as perverse and unreasonable beings, made up of human frailties and human vices.

This appeared unjust indeed to men of sense and reflection, and the ^b Roman Orator says upon the subject; O the wonderful equity of the Gods! Would any nation suffer a law to be made that the son should be condemned for the fault of the father? And yet the wise Romans in some cases acted as ^c unrea-

^a Horace *Carm.* III. ii. 30. III. vi. 1. Ovid *Met.* iv. 669. Virgil *Æn.* i. 45. &c. Bayle *Dict.* Ajax Oil. Not. c.

^b *De Nat. Deor.* iii. 38. The words are ascribed to Cotta; but doubtless they express the sentiments of Cicero, because they affirm no more than what no Philosopher of any sect would have denied.

^c See *Disc.* III. on the truth of the Christ. Relig.

nably, and punished the innocent with the guilty.

II. In the case of afflicting the children of wicked parents, it must be observed and acknowledged that God hath singular and peculiar rights which man cannot have, and also a power of making a compensation to the sufferers for any rigorous proceedings, which human governments commonly have not; because, first, with respect to God, all men are sinners, more or less, and God may chasten any of them for their personal iniquities; secondly, men have no right to any thing that they possess, exclusively of God; all that we have comes from him, as a thing lent or bestowed upon certain terms, which is the meaning of the words used by Job, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be his name; thirdly, when a person suffers in this life more than others who are not so good as himself, God can make it up to him hereafter. Upon all which accounts, if God should afflict the children of the wicked, it would not prove him unjust.

III. The denunciation that God would visit the sins of the fathers upon the children is annexed to the commandment against Idolatry.

Consequently it seems to be a national rather than a personal threatening. For Idolatry is not usually like other crimes, the fault of this or that man in society. It is an infectious and popular distemper; nor can it well enter into a nation without a general depravity, and consent of rulers and people. It was thus amongst the people of Israel; and in this case, as God was in a particular manner the Ruler of that people, and as this was rebellion and treason against him, he visited this iniquity in a general and national way; he punished them with pestilence, famine and sword, and gave them into the hands of their enemies, and sent them into captivity. In these general calamities the children were involved, and often suffered to the third and fourth generation. And indeed they must have often deserved it upon a personal account; for if a nation is generally degenerated and corrupted, which was the case of the Jews when they fell into idolatry, what could be expected from the next generation who had seen nothing but bad example from their infancy? What but this, that they should be even more wicked than their parents? As a Roman writer, who lived in a corrupted age, concluded

concluded justly enough, that * as they were worse than their degenerating fathers, so they should have an offspring worse than themselves. This was to be expected amongst the Jews; and the sufferings which God permitted to befall the posterity of idolaters were the only likely means of reclaiming them, and a desperate remedy of which they stood in need.

IV. As then this threatening was rather national than personal, so it was only generally but not constantly inflicted upon particular transgressors; and the same must be in some measure true concerning the promise of shewing mercy to a thousand generations of the righteous. National recompenses and corrections cannot be dealt out in an exact and invariable proportion to each person. If we knew what befell every person in that nation, we should find that God did not always visit their iniquities according to their several degrees of guilt: and yet in such a case, there was no inconsistency or want of veracity in God; for, as we before observed, when God threatens, he threatens what he may do, and not what he must do; and though he be obliged by his

* Horat. Carm. iii. vi. 46.

perfections to do nothing that is unjust, he is not obliged to do every thing that is just, every thing that he may justly do.

But though there be no necessity that God should punish because he hath threatened it, yet because it is fit that goodness should upon the whole have the advantage over iniquity, a just and equal dispensation of rewards and punishments is necessary to vindicate the divine providence and impartiality; and from this the certainty of a future state may be collected.

V. The iniquities of men have by the very nature of things, and by the connection of causes and effects, a tendency to hurt their families and their posterity. Now as these are natural consequences, God may be said in this case to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children; he may be said to do thus, according to the language of the Old Testament, and the Jewish phrase, which ascribe almost every thing to God that is done by his permission, and by the course of nature and of providence.

VI. When the children of sinners are afflicted, this is not to be always accounted a punishment. Either they deserve it, or they deserve it

is not. If by their own misbehaviour they justly incur it, they ought to receive it as a due punishment; if they are not addicted to vicious habits, and if they endeavour to do their duty, the evils which they endure are to be accounted inconveniences attending the present state of mortality, trials for the exercise of virtue, and corrections intended for improvement. For human calamities are not to be called divine judgments, unless there be something miraculous in them, or some revelation declaring them to be so. None can be entirely exempted from them; and even in the Jewish dispensation, wherein temporal rewards were more fully promised and more regularly given to the righteous, these promises were to be taken with proper restrictions and limitations.

VII. The Jews, in the time of Ezechiel, complained that they were punished, not for their own sins, but for the sins of their fathers; and God by the Prophet declares that this accusation of his providence was false and groundless. What he says may be reduced to the following answers:

First; you are and you must know yourselves to be a wicked generation. Therefore

whatsoever you suffer, you well deserve it upon your own account.

Secondly ; Though you lie under a national calamity, yet if any of you be dutiful and obedient to me, it is in my power to reward that man personally, and reward him I will.

Thirdly ; He who gives himself up to iniquity, and sets me and my laws at defiance, he shall not live, he shall surely die : but the righteous man and the penitent sinner shall live, shall save his soul alive.

In these expressions there is something ambiguous ; and the divine wisdom seems to have intended that it should be so.

To live, may mean, to enjoy long life and prosperity ; to die, may mean, to come to an untimely end.

Again ; to live may mean, to escape any preternatural and miraculous visitation ; to die may mean, to be cut off by a judgment of God, and a punishment plainly inflicted by him.

Lastly ; To live, and to die, may have some respect to a future state.

And now, let us suppose that this difference between the righteous and the wicked was not constantly and invariably made even in the
time

time of Ezechiel; and let us suppose farther that a Jew had expostulated again, and said; According to God's declaration, one might expect rewards and punishments in an exact proportion to goodness and iniquity; but this exact proportion is not kept, at least, it is not visible to us.

To such an objector God might have answered, by the Prophet, thus; Dost thou then suppose that the Almighty cannot make up this difference some way or other? Dost thou think that to live is only to draw this air and to dwell upon the earth for a short time? May there not be a state after this, in which my words shall be fulfilled?

But the divine Wisdom, it seems, would not at that time so fully clear up the doctrine of a future state. God had given to the Jews several intimations of it, and he left them to draw the inferences, reserving a perfect discovery to the times of the Messias.

Let us now consider how far these threatenings and promises concern us, and what effect they ought to have upon us.

Whatsoever calamities befall men, or nations, we have no warrant from the Gospel to call them divine judgments and punishments for

their own sins, much less for the sins of their ancestors. This is rather forbidden and condemned in the New Testament, as censoriousness and rashness, whether we judge thus of others, or whether others judge thus of us. True it is that calamities may come immediately from God, and may be punishments inflicted by him; but as herein Providence usually operates silently and secretly, we are not competent judges of it, and it is more proper for us to account temporal evils in general as no certain signs of guilt and of God's displeasure, and to consider them rather, what doubtless they are intended to be, namely means to produce good to the whole, and even good to the sufferers.

Indeed it becometh every person in time of adversity and affliction to judge himself, to acknowledge his own faults to God, and to submit decently to any harsh event, as to a law of mortality, to a trial, to a fatherly correction, and to endeavour to become better for it.

As the offences of sinners have a tendency to bring evil upon their posterity, and as God permits it so to be, and it is not to be expected that he will interpose to prevent it, in this sense, as we before observed, God might

S E R M O N II.

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be said to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children; and in this sense he ever continues to do so. Here then is a motive against iniquity, which applies itself to the natural affection which parents have for their children, and an earnest desire to promote their happiness. They are grieved to see them miserable, and they are not pleased to see them wicked, how bad soever they may be themselves; for so it is that virtue usually has our approbation, even when it hath not our affections. If a man be debauched and intemperate, careless and extravagant, unjust and insolent, faithless and perfidious, cruel and malicious, if he give a loose to his passions, and spoil his temper, it is more than probable that his children will suffer for it many ways, and not only in their fortunes and their bodies, but perhaps in their minds and their dispositions; for vices as well as diseases will sometimes run in the blood. A dreadful patrimony this, to leave to one's children, a kind of original sin, or evil propensity, which next to bad habits is one of the hardest things to conquer and correct.

As the entailing a curse on our posterity ought to be a powerful discouragement from
vice;

vice; so on the contrary, the advantages which descend to the children of the righteous should be a more forcible incitement to goodness. Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. It is here manifestly implied that the Almighty is a thousand times more prone to perform acts of beneficence than of severity; that he is far more disposed to grant the promised blessing, than to inflict the threatned evil. Therefore though in the calamities which befall the children of sinners, their sufferings ought rather to be ascribed to natural than to preternatural causes; yet in the prosperity of the children of the righteous, the case seems not to be the same, but there is great reason to suppose that not only the course of things, but the secret blessing of the Almighty concurs. The providence of God acts in a silent and mysterious manner, and may bring forth good to those whom he loves ten thousand various ways which we perceive not, by an influence which destroys not human liberty, by daily and hourly miracles not visible to mortal eyes. Here then is a double incitement
to

to goodness, that it will benefit our family and posterity, both by its own useful nature, and by the superadded favour of God.

A good parent gives his children a good education, and a good example, two things of inestimable value; and when he dies, he leaves them his reputation, and the credit of being descended from him, which may be of signal service to them, and raise them up friends and protectors when he is no more. These and many other advantages his just and prudent conduct procures to those who are so nearly related to him; to which, as we have observed, is to be joined the particular favour of God, who though he mercifully fails of executing the utmost of his threats, is not deficient on the other side, but is always better than his word.

to goodness, that it will benefit our family and posterity, both by its own useful nature, and by the superadded favour of God.

A GOOD MAN

education, and a good example, two things of inestimable value; and when he dies, he leaves them his reputation, and the credit of being descended from him, which may be of great service to them, and raise them up friends and

protectors when he is no more. There are many other advantages his good nature will confer on his family, and on the world, which it is not possible to reckon up. We have seen

how it is to be joined in particular favour of

God, who is to explain the law, and to give you

a right notion of it, and to be your guide

through the wilderness, but is always ready

to be asked by you, in the course

of your journey.

II. What is forbidden in it by plain com-

mandment:

III. What is the penalty annexed to the

breach of it, and upon what account this of-

fence is of to sinners a punishment:

IV. What notions the Jews had of this

commandment, and how they behaved with

relation to it.

V. What

S E R M O N III.

Exodus xx. 7.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

IN order to explain this law, and to give you right notions of it, it will be proper to consider,

I. What is directly forbidden in the commandment:

II. What is forbidden in it by plain consequence:

III. What is the penalty annexed to the breach of it, and upon what accounts this offence is of so heinous a nature:

IV. What notions the Jews had of this commandment, and how they behaved with relation to it:

V. What

V. What our Saviour hath taught concerning it, and how far he hath extended it :

VI. Whence it comes to pass that the violation of it is a fault so common and prevalent :

VII. Lastly, By what methods obedience to this divine law might best be secured.

1. We are to consider what is directly forbidden in the commandment ; Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Lying, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, is called vanity ; and to take the name of God in vain, is to call God to witness to an untruth, and to swear falsely by his name. The crime then which is forbidden in this commandment, is perjury, or swearing falsely by the name of the Lord : and this relates chiefly to promises made to God or to man, and solemnly confirmed by an oath ; for to swear falsely against a person, before the civil magistrate, and in bearing testimony, is considered as a distinct crime, and condemned in the ninth commandment ; Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

The third commandment requires of us, not to swear falsely by the name of the Lord ; and
this

this law pertains, first, to vows made to God himself, and confirmed by an oath.

It was a common practice amongst the people of Israel to make vows: their forefathers had done so from ancient times: the Law and the Prophets have neither forbidden it, nor commanded it. They permit it; but then they very strictly require the observance of a vow, what inconveniences soever it may draw after it: Thou shalt not forswear thyself; but thou shalt perform thine oaths and thy vows to the Lord. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.

A vow to God, though not accompanied with an oath, is much the same thing as an oath; for it is making a solemn promise to God. The breach of it differs little from perjury; and lying to God is a much greater offence than lying to men.

This commandment relates, secondly, to all promises made to men, and confirmed by an oath, to all contracts and engagements of this kind either between one nation and another, or between princes and subjects, or between man
and

and man in any of the affairs of life. Promises in themselves are sacred, and should be faithfully kept, and a man of honour and probity will account himself as much bound by them as by any additional tie; but when they are confirmed by oaths, they are still more sacred and inviolable. David describing a righteous person, says of him, that having sworn to his neighbour, he disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.

In all such covenants therefore, made with God, or man, singular care must be taken that we promise what we are able to perform, and what is lawful of its own nature; else a man involves himself in guilt, whether he keeps or breaks his oath.

This commandment relates, thirdly, to all sorts of declarations which a man makes and confirms by calling God to witness. If he knowingly lies upon such occasions, he is guilty of perjury; and if he is not sure that what he says is true, he exposes himself to the danger of perjury, and is justly to be accounted guilty of it by rash swearing.

But as to religious vows, if it be duly considered that we are under no obligation to bind ourselves with such engagements, that they may

may produce many unforeseen inconveniences, and cannot well produce any advantage, it is surely a wiser part to abstain totally from them, and in this, as in all other things, to stand fast in our natural and in our Christian liberty, instead of seeking out temptations and sorrows, and forging our own fetters. The Church of Rome therefore is highly to be blamed for encouraging such senseless superstition, and decoying young people into vows of a single and solitary life, vows which often end, at the best, in fruitless regret, which is a fool's repentance. We have instances enough in the Scriptures to deter us from vows; as that of Jephtha, who was obliged to devote his only daughter to the Lord, that is, probably, to perpetual servitude in the Tabernacle; of Saul, who to fulfill a foolish vow would have slain his son Jonathan; but the people, who were wiser than he, would not suffer it; and of David himself, who being affronted by Nabal, swore that he would destroy the man and all his family; but was prevented and pacified by the intreaties of Nabal's wife; and so he kept himself indeed from the worse guilt of murder, but yet at the expence of his oath, which he violated, and which he ought not to have made.

As to engagements and covenants solemnly contracted between man and man, these also should be avoided, unless absolute necessity requires them. The righteous man, says David, sweareth to his neighbour, and disappointeth him not. It is undoubtedly part of an honest man's character to observe his oaths, and to stand to his word: but a wise man will never swear to his neighbour when he can avoid it, will make him no rash promises, and will rather chuse to do him a kindness than to give him the expectations of one.

II. We have seen what is plainly and directly forbidden in this commandment: but, secondly, it follows by evident consequence that men ought not to use the name of God even in confirmation of things which are true, unless under circumstances which make it necessary or highly expedient. To act thus out of levity and wantonness on every occurrence, on trivial occasions, on every doubt and dispute, though it be in attestation of a certain truth, is a great disrespect shewed to God, and the direct way to perjury; since he who sweareth lightly and frequently and habitually, will certainly, though undesignedly, swear to many falsehoods. It is the way also to teach others

the same bad habit, and to lead them to the same crime; since men by conversing with profane talkers are insensibly induced to imitate them; and thus a contempt for religion is countenanced and increased.

It follows also by plain consequence, that the name of God must not be profaned in wishing evil to others, and calling upon God to curse them; which is a double crime, both against God and against man, and a crime which no case, no circumstances, and no provocation can excuse.

It follows likewise that men must not speak prophanely and irreverently of God, and set him at defiance, which is blasphemy; a crime even of a more shocking nature than the former, and to which nothing but consummate wickedness can prompt any one who is in his senses. Blasphemy is a crime against which there was no law made, and for which no punishment was appointed, till one miserable man was guilty of it, as we read in Leviticus. He was immediately seized and put in prison, and they consulted God, to know what they should do with him. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying; Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp, and let all that heard

him lay their hands upon him, and let all the congregation stone him. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God, shall bear his sin: and he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him.

The sentence was just. He who curseth his Maker deserves to die. But it may not be improper to observe, that Christians by an intemperate zeal have been too free in charging one another with blasphemy, and in their laws against it have sometimes extended it too far, and included in it what, properly speaking, was not to be called blasphemy. Some persons also have suffered as Blasphemers, who ought rather to have been confined as Lunatics.

III. We are to consider thirdly, what is the penalty annexed to the breach of this precept, and upon what accounts this offence is of so heinous a nature. The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

This is a figure of speech frequently used, according to which more is meant than is expressed. God will not account him innocent; that is, he will treat him as an heinous offender, with the utmost rigour.

It was the opinion of the antient Gentiles that perjury was severely punished by the Gods, and entailed a curse upon a man and his family, and all his posterity. Divine Revenge, said they, moves on slowly and silently, and unseen of mortal eyes; but follows the steps of the offender with obstinate perseverance, and never gives over the pursuit till she overtakes and destroys him. The prophet Ezechiel presents to our view almost the same Image of Vengeance, and speaks in like manner. The prophet had a vision of a flying Roll, and it was explained to him; This is the Curse that goeth over the face of the whole earth.—I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name; and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof.

Because profane conversation, blasphemy, cursing, swearing and perjury are crimes which can seldom be inquired into and punished by the civil magistrate, therefore God takes it into his own hands, as an offence directly against himself, and declares that though men in authority may not be able, or may not be wil-

ling to punish such transgressors, yet they shall not escape his judgments. It is to be supposed that in ancient times, whilst God acted as the temporal King of the people of Israel, and ruled them with a particular providence, the crime of perjury was usually punished by him in a particular manner. After this extraordinary government declined and ceased amongst the Jews, and when the Christian dispensation took place, temporal judgments were not so conspicuous, and such sinners are reserved, like others, for the judgment of the great day.

Concerning the unfortunate king Zedekiah, we read that the king of Babylon besieged Jerusalem, and destroyed it, and took Zedekiah, and slew his sons before his face, and put out his eyes, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon, and cast him into prison till the day of his death. This was most cruel and inhuman revenge. But Zedekiah had made a covenant with the Babylonian, and had sworn homage and allegiance to him, and then had violated his oath; and this, as the prophet Ezechiel expressly declares, brought down these heavy judgments upon him: Thus saith the Lord God concerning Zedekiah; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and
my

my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head.

The reasons for which God declares himself so highly offended at perjury are very manifest. It is a Crime which implies no less than a disbelief of his perfections and providence, or a bold contempt of his love and his authority. It also destroys all confidence that men can place in one another, dissolves all contracts and engagements, and tends to subvert civil society. When once this crime becomes popular and general, it must needs be accompanied with a total dissolution of manners, and an overflowing of ungodliness.

IV. The fourth thing which we proposed to consider, was what notion the Jews had of this commandment, and how they behaved with relation to it.

The Jews, that is those of the nation who had any piety and probity, ever accounted perjury to be an heinous crime, as they were taught to account it by the Law and by the Prophets, and by the example of God's just severity upon such offenders. In times when wickedness abounded amongst them, they were guilty of this as of other crimes, as it may be supposed, and as it usually happens.

The Jews held the name of God in high veneration, which was right and fit ; but as they had a turn for superstition, and an inclination to imitate their Pagan neighbours, this veneration degenerated into a fantastical scruple, and they held it unlawful to pronounce the name which God had given to himself, the name of Jehovah, even on the most serious occasions, and in reading the holy Scriptures ; but instead of it, they always said, The Lord.

Like other nations they were much disposed to swear in conversation ; and fearing to transgress the third commandment, and to take the name of God in vain, they took up a custom of swearing, not by the Lord, but by other things, by other objects of esteem and veneration, as by heaven and earth, by the temple, by the altar ; and thus they thought to evade the commandment, and to indulge themselves in the practice of swearing, and even of forswearing, without incurring danger. Our Saviour condemned those evasive oaths, and told them that to swear by the temple was the same thing as to swear by that God to whom the temple was consecrated, and that the breach of all such kind of oaths was no better than perjury.

V. This

V. This brings us, fifthly, to consider what our Saviour hath taught concerning this commandment, and how far he hath extended it.

Ye have heard, says he, that it hath been said,—Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but thou shalt perform to the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all—but let your conversation be, yea, yea, nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

St. James hath expressed himself in like manner, and in the words of his Master: Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, lest ye fall into condemnation.

Many Pagan Philosophers have said the same, and condemned all oaths without exception; many antient Christians, adhering to the letter of our Saviour's precept, have also forbidden all swearing; the best Moralists in general, Pagans, Jews, or Christians, have confined the permission of taking an oath to very few cases, and have laid many restraints upon this evil custom, for evil it is whensoever it can be avoided. In later times some sects of Christians have totally condemned all oaths as unlawful. But in this they have carried their scruples too far;

and this is one of the inconveniences which will always arise, when religious but injudicious persons lay hold on single texts of Scripture, and undertake to interpret them, without comparing them with other passages, and calling in the light of reason and natural sense to their aid. That oaths are lawful in matters of importance, appears from the practice of our Lord himself, who being adjured by the High-priest in the name of God, answered to the adjuration, and by the example of St. Paul, who several times in his Epistles calls God to witness upon solemn occasions. In the Old Testament, and in the Law, oaths are not only permitted, but enjoined, and consequently could not be unlawful in themselves, and immoral in their own nature. God himself is frequently introduced swearing by himself, by his truth, and by his own life. Hence it is extremely plain to all who are not perverse and contentious, that our Saviour's prohibition hath nothing to do with oaths taken upon proper occasions before the Magistrate, but with oaths which are voluntary and unnecessary. Swear not at all; that is; Swear not in common conversation.

VI. Let

VI. Let us now consider whence it comes to pass that the violation of this commandment by profane cursing and swearing is so general a fault.

It hath been frequently observed concerning swearing, that it is one of the most inexcusable of bad habits, because there is so little apparent temptation to it. Other sins, say they, put on a deceitful and wear an alluring appearance; they delude and entice us by offering a present profit, or by the charm of present pleasure, or by setting before us the prospect of avoiding some pain and inconvenience; and so they work upon our passions, desires, hopes and fears. Some sins also have a sort of connection with some tempers, and meet with encouragement from the natural bent and disposition: but in oaths and curses there is no profit, no pleasure, no prospect of any advantage to be obtained, or of any detriment to be shunned; no original infirmity to be pleaded, since no man hath a propensity to this silly vice, or is born with a^a swearing constitution.

And yet people are and have been greatly addicted to it, of all nations and of all reli-

^a Tillotson.

gions.

gions. The precepts of the Philosophers could not cure the Pagans of this fault; the plain and express command of Christ and of his Apostles have not banished it from the Christian world.

What is the reason of this? and whence comes it to pass that this crime, which is so senseless and unprofitable, should so abound? It is not difficult to assign the causes of it.

It is a vice which reigns amongst mean, ignorant, vicious and profligate people, who have no education, no sense of religion, no moral principles, and who not only are wicked, but love to appear so. A thoughtless stupidity, hardened villainy, consummate impudence, bad company, and the imitation of other reprobates concur to produce this profane language. It hath also, as they fancy, an air of liberty and courage, and it shews a resolute spirit to set God and men at defiance, and to curse themselves and others. When once such a custom prevails amongst common people, it will be kept up because it seems fashionable, and one reason for which persons of better rank are at present not remarkably addicted to it, is because it is ungenteel, and not adopted by their equals and superiors.

But

But besides the causes already mentioned, anger is a great incentive to it; and since anger is so common, it is no wonder that cursing and swearing should be a common vice: when persons are slaves to anger, and easily and frequently enraged, their fury will vent itself in such scandalous language, which gives a kind of present ease and relief to a mind choaked and oppressed with rage, and, for the time, void of all discretion.

Drunkenness is another incentive to it; drunkenness, that slow but certain poison, which when it spreads amongst the lower people, who are the bulk of society, stupifies their senses, weakens their understanding, spoils their temper, inflames their passions, shortens their days, withers their strength, ruins their health, keeps them in beggary, transforms them from human creatures into beasts, and entails sickness and infirmities both of body and mind upon their miserable children. What better language than oaths and execrations is to be expected from such persons, and what hopes of their amendment can be entertained?

Gaming is another incentive to it. The violent desires, the hopes, the fears, the anxieties,

ties, the disappointments, the rage, the despair, the sudden, heavy, and irretrievable losses that attend this abominable occupation, produce blasphemies, execrations, oaths, and perjuries, besides other numberless iniquities: for if a man be a gamester by profession, you may take it for granted that he is also a liar and a cheat, and bad in every relation that he bears to other people; a bad husband, a bad father, a bad master of a family, a bad son, false in his friendships, and faithless in all his dealings.

In a word, every passion which by being humoured goes beyond its bounds, and destroys the composure of mind and the sober regularity of thinking and acting, produces amongst other bad effects, a profane conversation, and an irreligious profusion of evil words.

VII. Let us conclude with a few considerations on the proper methods to check the wide-spread evil of taking the holy name of God in vain by profane language and by perjury.

Christian nations ought to correct these abuses by strict laws and proper penalties. Such laws we have, if they were put in execution.

Christian

Christian nations ought to discourage and restrain all vice and immorality, all that tends to debauch the minds and the manners of the people. Every wise government will have a particular care to maintain regularity and obedience, and to promote national industry, sobriety, frugality and probity; and these will produce national honour and courage.

As to the sin of perjury, it is much to be wished that Christian governments would lay as few temptations to it as they possibly can, and would be rather sparing than forward in requiring public oaths, which too often do more harm than good. When men are obliged to take them frequently, and upon too many occasions, they are apt either to comply against their inclination, or with no good conscience, or without a due reverence to God and to society, with a slovenly contempt, and a thoughtless heedless disregard, and to look upon these solemn asseverations as upon mere words of course that mean nothing at all. They who are acquainted with English History know how this poor nation hath been plagued with the imposition of oaths, oaths unreasonable, absurd, tyrannical, detestable.

As

As every one ought to love his country, and to seek its welfare, so every one is able to contribute something towards it. Every family is a little society; and he who presides over it should use his best endeavours to keep his children, his servants, his domestics in good order, and to allow no irreligious conversation, no irregularities and immoralities in his house. If this duty were tolerably practised by masters of families, the good effects of it would soon be visible. Whosoever acts thus, acts the part of a friend and benefactor to the public, and must certainly reap the benefit of it at home; and whether others will or will not follow his example, he hath performed his own part, and delivered his own soul.

S E R.

SERMON IV.

Exodus xx. 8.

Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.

THE nature of the Sabbath, the ends for which it was instituted, and the degree in which we ought to observe it, are subjects worthy of our consideration, both as they concern our duty to God, and as they give light to many passages in both Testaments.

The Law delivered to the people of Israel concerning the Sabbath is commonly supposed to have enjoined two things; to rest from all work; and to worship God in a solemn manner: for so Jews and Christians have usually understood it. The ^a Gentiles, either malici-

^a Septima quæque dies turpi damnata veterno,

Tanquam lassati mollis imago Dei.

Rutilius.

ously or ignorantly, derided the Jews, as devoting one day in seven to idleness and sloth, and throwing away so considerable a part of life. But the Jews deserved not that reproach, and looked upon the Sabbath as upon a day which was to be spent in serving God, and in studying those divine laws which ^b concerned their temporal and their spiritual welfare. To call such occupations idleness, is to give them a very wrong name. They had public assemblies to this end, and Moses of old time had in every city them that preached him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-day.

The Gentiles derided the Jews also for representing their God, as resting from his work on the seventh day, as if he had been fatigued with the labour of forming the world. But there is nothing which may not be made the subject of cavil and ridicule. All languages have their figurative expressions, and the word itself of *resting* sometimes means no more than to give over, or cease from acting. Indeed the objection came with a very ill grace from a Pagan, whose popular religion was full of the labours, the disappointments, the calamities,

^b Origen contra Celsum, l. iv. p. 182.

the mistakes, the sufferings, the follies, and the vices of the Gods.

It must be acknowledged that the commandment concerning the Sabbath seems to require

See Le Clerc on Exod. xx. 8. and Spencer.

Josephus contr. Apion. ii. 17. says,

“ Nor did he (Moses) think it sufficient for us to hear the words of the Law once or twice, or even more frequently; but he commanded us once in every week, laying aside all other occupations, to assemble together, to hear it with attention, and to fix it in our mind. This is what all other Legislators have neglected to require.

Οὐκ εισάπαξ ἀκροασάμενος, ἐπὶ δὲ ἡ πολλάν, ἀλλ’ ἐκάστης ἑβδομάδος, τῶν ἄλλων ἔργων ἀφεμένους, ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκρόασιν τοῦ νόμου ἐκέλευσε συλλέγεσθαι, καὶ τοῦτον ἀκριβοῶς ἐμμανθάνειν· ὃ δὲ πάντες οἱ νομοθέται εἰκόασιν παραλιπῆν.

The misfortune is that when we seek for this precept, we cannot find it. One way to bring Josephus off, is to suppose that ἐκέλευσε only means, *he permitted*. So Mr. Whiston boldly translates it; but this interpretation cannot be admitted; and the following words, ὃ δὲ, &c. confute it.

Another thing to be said for Josephus, is that he founded his opinion on *Levit. xxiii. 2.*

“ Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation.”

But though it should be granted that by an holy convocation may be meant an assembly held for the performance of religious acts, yet here is no command to read the Law, or to hear it read.

Lastly; it may be alledged that Moses says;

“ These words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them, &c. and talk of them continually, and at all times, &c.” *Deut. vi. 6.*

quire nothing more than a strict and solemn rest from labour; and even thus interpreted, it was a wise and merciful law, intended partly for the benefit and refreshment of slaves, whose condition was in all nations and in all times hard and wretched. But they who consecrated the Sabbath to acts of religion must be allowed to have sanctified it in a more excellent sense, than if they had only abstained from labour.

The command of resting on the Sabbath was delivered in the most strict and positive terms: “Ye shall do no manner of work. Ye shall kindle no ^d fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.” But whether this particular prohibition was of perpetual obligation, is matter of doubt. Certain it is that no law is more frequently inculcated in the books of Moses than the law of the Sabbath, and that no mercy was to be shewed to

If at all times, certainly and more especially, on the Sabbath days, and at the holy convocations.

This seems to be a fair inference; but it amounts not to a positive command.

Philo agrees with Josephus, saying;

Ἐξομαίς ἡμέρας αὐτὰς εἰς ταύτῃ ἡξίς συναίγεσθαι, καὶ καθίζουσι μετ' ἀλλήλων—τῶν νόμων ἀγεῖσθαι.—Apud Eusebium, *Præp. Evang.* viii. 359.

^d See the Author of the *Recognitions* of Clemens, and the remarks of Cotelerius, *Patr. Apost.* i. p. 585.

those who transgressed it, no expiation was appointed for their crime. "Whosoever doth any work on the Sabbath, he shall surely be put to death." This was often repeated; and the man who gathered sticks on that day was stoned to death by God's own command.

The Sabbath was given to the Jews to keep them from idolatry, atheism, and irreligion, by obliging them frequently and continually to celebrate the creation of heaven and earth. "Verily, my Sabbaths ye shall keep; for it is a sign between me and you—that ye may know that I am the Lord.—It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth.—Take heed lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldst be driven to worship them, and to serve them which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven."

It was also instituted to remind them of their deliverance from Ægyptian bondage, during which they had been condemned to servile labour with unmerciful severity: therefore it was made a day of strict rest from all labour.

“Remember that thou wast a slave in the land of Ægypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm : therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.”

And that the remembrance of the inhuman usage which they had received in Ægypt might produce in them an abhorrence for all oppression and cruelty, the Sabbath was instituted as a day in which their hired servants and slaves, and even their cattle might enjoy a time of rest.

“That thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thine handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed.”

This and other kind laws made in favour of slaves, servants, and strangers, were reasonable in themselves, and productive of good effects. We often read, in history, of dangerous conspiracies formed, and of wars waged by slaves and captives. In all probability it was cruel usage which stirred them up to these acts of desperate violence against their unmerciful masters. But in the Jewish history we meet with no such instance of seditions and rebel-

* Le Clerc on *Exod.* xx. 8.

lions; probably, because their slaves were better treated and less oppressed than in many other countries.

These were the ends for which the Sabbath was instituted; and to violate this law, was (indirectly at least, and by way of consequence) to deny that God had created the world, and had brought the people of Israel out of Ægypt; and therefore this offence was punished as severely as idolatry and blasphemy.

The Jews from the time of the Judges to the Babylonian captivity, for above the space of eight hundred years, frequently neglected the worship of God and the observation of the Sabbath, falling into idolatry and into all the vices of their Pagan neighbours. The Prophets reproach them in particular for polluting and profaning the Sabbath, and tell them that for this crime, as much as for any, God had sent them and would send them into captivity.

From their return out of captivity they fell no more nationally into idolatry, and were more careful observers of the ritual and ceremonial law.

How far the prohibition of doing any work on the Sabbath extended, and what exceptions

it admitted, was, as we may suppose, matter of much doubt and dispute amongst them, and they had determined differently about it in different times.

It appears ^f from history that the Jews suffered much in many occasions by not daring to fight on the Sabbath. In the [§] time of the Maccabees, a great slaughter was made of them on the Sabbath, because they thought it unlawful to defend themselves; whereupon they passed a decree, that for the time to come, if they were attacked on that day, they would not suffer themselves to be destroyed; they agreed for the future to fight on the Sabbath days, but so far only as to defend their lives, not to assault their enemies, or hinder them from forwarding a siege; which exposed them to great inconveniences in their wars, especially when they were besieged.

In our Saviour's time they were not all of a mind concerning the law of the Sabbath; some were more rigid, and some more indulgent in their determinations.

^f Josephus i. p. 584. 689. ii, 67. 190. Edit. Haverc. Agatharchides derided the Jews for permitting Ptolomy Lagi to enter Jerusalem, and seize it on a Sabbath day.

[§] i Maccab. ii. 28. Josephus i. 612.

That

That the Law admitted some exceptions, a Jew might reasonably have concluded from the nature of the thing, and from examples in the Scriptures. He might have reasoned in the following manner:

1. God, who commanded a strict rest upon the Sabbath-day, enjoined some other laws which could not be observed without a violation of that rest. The law of circumcision on the eighth day, and the law of daily sacrifices could not be fulfilled, unless work were done on the Sabbath. Therefore it is plain that God never intended a rigorous rest which should suffer no exceptions at all.

2. There are examples in Scripture of prophets and holy persons, who upon extraordinary occasions acted contrary to some ritual laws; whence the same conclusion follows.

3. God gave the Jews two sorts of laws. He gave them laws requiring of them actions which were good and right in themselves antecedently to those laws, and which are of perpetual obligation, as piety, purity, mercy, justice, and the like. These are moral laws.

He gave them laws, commanding or forbidding things which appeared indifferent in their own nature, but were intended without question

question for wise and good purposes. Such were, to offer sacrifices, to observe a strict rest upon the seventh day, not to plow or sow the seventh year, and the like. These are positive, ritual, ceremonial laws.

Now though both are to be observed, as far as is possible, with the utmost care and caution, yet in case they should ever interfere, the latter in reason ought to give place, as less useful, less weighty, and important. So likewise say the Prophets, declaring that God will have mercy and not sacrifice, namely where both cannot be had, that he prefers morality to rites and ceremonies, where the one or the other must be left undone.

4. In the interpretation of laws commanding or prohibiting in general terms, things ought not to be strained to the utmost rigour, which is often the utmost injustice. Equity should be allowed to take place, and to mitigate what in particular cases and circumstances becomes unreasonable; the letter of the law should then yield to the supposed intention of the lawgiver, which was, to require nothing unfit; and it is to be concluded that in all general injunctions and prohibitions there are tacit exceptions in cases of necessity. And this inter-

interposition of equity is allowable more particularly in ritual and ceremonial laws.

Thus a Jew might have reasoned; and it is probable that many of them did reason in this manner; for it was an opinion more generally received amongst them that the law of doing no manner of work admitted exceptions in cases where life was concerned.

But as the manner in which the Sabbath ought to be observed was a frequent dispute between our Lord and the Jews; they accusing him and his disciples of profaning the Sabbath, and he justifying himself and confuting them from Scripture and reason, it will be proper to consider that controversy.

It may be observed, first, that if the law of resting on the Sabbath had been broken by our Lord, the Jews could not justly object that to him as a crime. For as no ritual law can be discovered to be a duty till God hath revealed and enjoined it, it is plain that He who made it a law by positive appointment, can dispense with the observance of it, or repeal it. Therefore Christ, who shewed by undeniable proofs that he was sent from God, shewed that he had a power to suspend the observance of a ritual law.

It must also be noted that our Lord, who was born under the law, and obedient to the law, observed it religiously, and fulfilled all righteousness, and never acted contrary to the true intent of it, and that whilst he was on earth he did not abrogate or dissolve the Sabbath, but only explained and set it in a true light. He spent it constantly in acts of piety and charity, in healing and teaching the people, in doing good to their bodies and to their souls.

The objection which was made to him, that by miraculous cures he violated the Sabbath day, was a senseless and wicked cavil; for how by reason, or how by revelation, by what law divine or human, could he be accused of working on the Sabbath, because he had removed diseases and infirmities by only speaking a few words? When a ruler of the synagogue, full of indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, had said to the people, There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come and be healed; and not on the Sabbath day; Christ calls him an hypocrite, who had the glory of God in his mouth, and other things in his heart.

“ On

“ On a Sabbath day, Jesus went through the corn, and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold thy disciples do that which it is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day ?”

To pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath was forbidden by the expounders of the law. Our Lord excuses it as a case of necessity, laying it down, that where the preservation of life or of health was concerned, this ritual law might be set aside. His arguments are these.

1. “ Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him? how he did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests ?”

That is ; The shew-bread, according to the law, was to be eaten by none except the priests. But David, a prophet, in a case of necessity, pressed by hunger, did eat of it, and gave it to those who were with him. If then hunger excuses the breach of one ritual law, it will excuse the breach of another.

2. “ Have

2. "Have ye not read in the law how that on the Sabbath day the priests profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"

That is; The priests occupied in the service of the temple profane the Sabbath constantly, according to the letter of the law, in preparing and offering up daily sacrifices. But as this is done by divine command, it is not in reality a profanation of the Sabbath. Therefore the prohibition of working that day admits exceptions.

If it admits any exceptions, it certainly admits them in this case. I am a prophet, and am doing the work of God: I and my disciples are employed in things of the utmost consequence, and have no leisure to prepare ourselves food against the Sabbath day. We must therefore act thus to satisfy hunger, or we must render ourselves unfit to prosecute the office to which God hath called us.

3. "I say unto you that in this place is one greater than the temple."

That is; If the priests are blameless in working on the Sabbath, because it is done for the service of the temple, much more are my disciples excuseable in gathering and eating ears of corn, that they may be able to attend upon
the

the service of a Master who is greater than the temple, a divine person, sanctified by the spirit; and in whom the Father dwelleth.

4. "If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."

That is; God hath declared to you by his prophets that ritual laws are of less esteem in his sight than the great duties of morality; that he will have mercy and not sacrifice, or, rather than sacrifice, when one must be omitted; that if ever the letter of a ceremonial law is not consistent with a law of morality, it must give place to that which is more important. This general rule, when applied to the case of the Sabbath, teaches that the good of mens souls, or the preservation of their lives may be promoted by actions which rigorously interpreted might be accounted a breach of rest.

5. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

That is; The Sabbath was a merciful institution, and not a burden. It was plainly intended for the good of man, for the refreshment of his body, and for the improvement of his mind. Whatsoever therefore manifestly conduces

conduces to preserve his life, or to increase in him virtue and religion, is not to be deemed a breach of the rest enjoined on that day.

6. "The son of man is lord of the Sabbath."

That is; since the Sabbath is made for the sake of man, and not man for the sake of the Sabbath, ^h Christ, who comes to do good, may perform any action on that day which promotes the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind.

To these arguments of our Lord we may add those which he used upon the like occasions at other times. He reasons thus:

If you upon the Sabbath day loose an ox or an ass from his stall, and lead him to water, or draw him out of a pit, much more may I on that day cure the sick and the infirm.

It appears from these arguments, and from some Jewish authors, that, according to the general opinion, the law of not working on the seventh day might be set aside in cases where life was concerned, and not only the life of a man, but even of a beast. If the life or the health of a beast may be preserved on

^h The Son of man seems here rather to mean Christ, than man in general. See Grotius, Le Clerc, Hammond, and Whitby, on Matt. xii. 8.

that day, surely the health of a man. And if the life of a man may be saved without danger of violating the law, by the same equitable construction whatsoever tends to remove pain and sickness, and to make his life easy to him, may be lawfully done. This reasoning was plain, convincing and unanswerable.

Again : If you break the rest of the Sabbath-day by circumcising your children, in obedience to a ritual precept, you ought not to blame me for restoring a miserable man to health on that day.

Again, “ My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”

That is ; You have a wrong notion of the Sabbatic law. You read that God rested on the seventh day. He rests indeed from his work of the visible creation ; but in the government or preservation of the things which he hath made, he worketh hitherto, and will ever work, doing good to his creatures at all times. In these instances, and in imitation of him, I also work continually, doing acts of mercy on the Sabbath-day, as well as on other days.

Christ on the Sabbath healed an impotent man, and commanded him to take up his bed

and walk. The man did as he was ordered, for which he was accused of breaking the Sabbath.

That a man should carry his bed on the Sabbath, was undoubtedly contrary to the letter of the law: but then it is to be considered, first, that this action was not done in contempt of the law, or for any worldly ends, but was a public testimony of a signal miracle of mercy, inciting men to praise and glorify God, and tending rather to sanctify than to profane the day.

Observe also that Christ, by ⁱ virtue of his divine mission and of the miracles which he wrought, had a power of suspending or of setting aside any ceremonial law, and that he did no more than many prophets and holy men, inferior to him in all respects, had done before him. He had the examples of Joshua, David, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, and the decisions of the Jewish Doctors, to justify him, and to shew that the literal sense of the law might be mitigated, when the reason was apparent and pressing.

ⁱ See Discourse I. concerning the Truth of the Christ. Rel. and Spencer, i. p. 26.

There is, for example, a law delivered in general terms, and without exception :

* “ Three times in a year all thy males shall appear before the Lord in the place which he shall chuse.”

Yet was this law interpreted by the Jews according to reason and equity ; for, first, they did not carry their children there before they were twelve years old, at which time Christ went up with his parents to Jerusalem ; and secondly, they thought that those persons only were obliged to observe this precept who dwelt

* Grotius on Luke ii. 42. and Le Clerc on Exod. xxiii. “ It may be questioned whether all males without respect were to appear ; for it is not likely that young children should, or decrepit old men could appear. I answer therefore, that it is to be understood of all males who were within the age and years of service, namely between twenty and fifty : for at fifty it is apparent that all were *emeriti*. Even the Priests and Levites served not after that age. But at what years they became capable of service, there is difference. The Priests might not serve in the priest's office afore thirty. *Numb. viii. 24.* But the laity were capable of employment, and serviceable at twenty ; as appeareth *Numb. i. 2, 3.* where God commands Moses to take the sum of all the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upwards, all that are able to go forth to war ; so implying that from twenty years of age they were able for that service.” *J. Mede, Disc. xlvii. p. 261.*

Grotius on *Luke ii. 41.* offers another interpretation of this law, which seems probable ; namely, that the males were obliged every year, by turns or courses, on some of the three festivals ; so that if a third part of the inhabitants went at a time, it was sufficient.

in Judæa, and that the Jews who were out of their own borders were excused.

Another passage remains concerning our subject, which deserves consideration. Christ foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, says to his hearers ;

“ Pray that your flight be not in the winter, nor on the Sabbath-day.

Here observe, first, that in the opinion of the Jews, to take journeys on the Sabbath was a breach of the law. Yet the greater part of them was not so rigorous as to forbid all walking on that day, but allowed a moderate distance, which was called a Sabbath-day's journey, and was about a mile :

Secondly, That the unbelieving Jews were rather more superstitious in their observance of the Sabbath after Christ's resurrection than they were before ; and that, possibly, out of hatred and opposition to him :

Thirdly, That the Jews converted to the Gospel were strict observers of the whole law, and did not think themselves released from any part of it by Jesus Christ, but kept it zealously until the destruction of Jerusalem, and much longer.

Now,

Now, say some Interpreters, our Lord knowing that even his followers would be strict observers of the law, bids them pray that the day when they would find it necessary for the preservation of their lives to fly from Jerusalem might not be a Sabbath, on which they would not dare to fly, for fear of breaking the commandment.

But since from the doctrine of Christ concerning the Sabbath it follows plainly that a Jew might, or rather that he ought to fly on that day to save his life, I should prefer another interpretation, which is given to these words, thus ; Pray that your flight be not in the winter, when long journeys are most difficult ; nor on the Sabbath, lest you be exposed to the indignation of the unconverted Jews, as profaning that day in their opinion.

From the things which have been said we may learn that the contest between our Lord and the Jews was not whether the Sabbath should be kept holy and spent in the service of God ; for that Duty he exactly observed. His disciples also did not imagine themselves released from keeping the Sabbath, or even from resting strictly on it, when they had no work of necessity or charity to hinder them.

They did not, I say, think themselves released from this law, at the time of his death, by any thing that he had said upon the subject. The women who had attended him to his grave, prepared spices and ointments, and rested the sabbath-day according to the ¹ commandment.

The dispute then between Christ and the Jews was whether it were lawful to do works of mercy and necessity on that day; which they denied, and he affirmed and proved.

It is worthy of observation that our Lord explains ritual and moral laws in a very different manner, in the former allowing a favourable latitude, in the latter requiring great exactness.

What he taught concerning the sabbath amounts to this: Ye have heard it said; Thou shalt do no manner of work on the seventh day: but I say unto you that this prohibition was not intended to be so rigorous, as to admit no exception, and that what is necessary for the preservation of life and health, what justice and mercy and charity require is not to be deemed a breach of that law.

¹ Grotius on *Luke* xxiii. 56.

But when he explains moral laws, it is thus :
Ye have heard that it was said ; Thou shalt
not kill : but I say unto you, Ye shall not be
angry without a cause. Ye have heard that
it hath been said ; Thou shalt not forswear
thyself : but I say unto you that in your con-
versation ye shall not swear at all. Ye have
heard that it hath been said ; Thou shalt love
thy neighbour : but I say unto you that by
the word, neighbour, is to be understood every
man, even a stranger, even an enemy.

But when he explains moral law, it is this:
 Ye have heard that it was said: Thou shalt
 not kill: but I say unto you, Ye shall not be
 angry without cause. Ye have heard that
 it hath been said: Thou shalt not swear
 thyself: but I say unto you that in your oag-
 vestings ye shall not swear at all. Ye have
 heard that it hath been said: Thou shalt love
 thy neighbour: but I say unto you that by
 the word, neighbour, is to be understood every
 man, even a stranger, even an enemy.

Now a former discourse I endeavored to ex-
 plain the nature of the Sabbath, and our
 Saviour's doctrine concerning it in his dispute
 with the Jews.
 It remains to say how far the law of the
 Sabbath concerns Christians.
 The law of the Sabbath is of a mixed na-
 ture, partly moral, and partly moral. The
 moral part is that we are to keep it holy,
 and to observe it with reverence, thanksgiving,
 and the like, and to give it to a special
 use. The moral part is that every man
 shall be the master of time, and that a
 day shall be a day of rest on that day.

S E R M O N V.

EXODUS xx. 8.

Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.

IN a former discourse I endeavoured to explain the nature of the Sabbath, and our Saviour's doctrine concerning it in his disputes with the Jews.

It remains to shew how far the law of the Sabbath concerns Christians.

The law of the Sabbath is of a mixed nature, partly ritual, and partly moral. The moral part is, that every one ought to set aside a portion of their time to perform acts of piety and devotion, as prayer, thanksgiving, and the like, and to meet together for that purpose. The ritual part is, that every seventh day shall be that portion of time, and that a strict rest shall be observed on that day.

That

That part therefore which is moral, namely a solemn worship of God at stated times, is an everlasting law.

The same will appear, if we examine the ends for which the Sabbath was instituted.

It was instituted in general for the preservation and promotion of religion; and some such law, divine, or human, is necessary for that end. For we cannot perform a reasonable service to God without some knowledge of his nature and of his will; nor is this knowledge to be acquired without instruction and serious meditation, nor to be kept up without stated times for public worship.

It was instituted to preserve men from idolatry, irreligion, scepticism, and atheism. That they might not worship the host of heaven, or a multitude of Gods, or that they might not imagine that the world was without beginning and of itself, or made by Chance or by Necessity, the Sabbath was given as a memorial of the creation, and a day for the worship of one God, maker of heaven and earth; and on this account likewise it is of perpetual use.

It was given to the Jews for a commemoration of their deliverance from Ægyptian bondage, during which they had been obliged to

unrea-

S E R M O N V.

91

unreasonable labour, and therefore they were ordered to abstain that day from all manner of work. This is peculiar to them only; as is also the command that their slaves and cattle should enjoy the like rest. But these commands are partly ceremonial and partly moral; ceremonial, as they were a commemoration of redemption from bondage, and moral as they teach men to lay aside worldly affairs on the portion of time set apart for religious duties, and as they require from them humanity and mercy towards their servants, and even towards their beasts.

The reasonableness of obeying the moral part of this law appears also from the consequences of the observation and of the neglect of it amongst the Jews.

If we enquire how it came to pass that the Jews before the Babylonian captivity were so prone to idolatry, and so averse from it afterwards, we shall find this to be no improbable reason, which a ^a writer of our own hath suggested: Before the captivity they had ^b few, if any

^a Prideaux, *Connex.* P. I. B. vi.

^b However, it seems probable that the Israelites of old had, besides the Tabernacle, some few *Proseucha*, places to pray or worship in;

any synagogues for public worship and public instruction; for want of which they grew ignorant, and were easily seduced into the superstitious and idolatrous practices of the neighbouring nations. But after their return from the captivity, synagogues were erected in every city, to which they constantly resorted on the sabbath days for public worship, and where they had the scriptures read and expounded to them. By this method they acquired and retained a knowledge of religion; and by the same method Christianity hath been established and preserved; and without question, if it were laid aside, the people would be as ignorant and as barbarous as were their ancestors before the preaching of the Gospel.

There is then too much reason to suspect that they who totally disregard this duty have neither just notions of the Gospel, nor a heart inclined to obey it, and that a practical know-

in; as also that they resorted on the Sabbath days to the prophets for religious instruction.

See Psalm lxxiv. 8. Prideaux, P. I. B. vi. Mede, B. I. Disc. xviii. Vitringa, *De Synag Vet.* L. I. P. ii. c. 6. et in Isai. xxii. 18. Mede, *Letter* lxi.

Le Clerc on II. Kings xxi. 11. and in *Bibl. Chetif.* xvi. 142, hath assigned some causes for the frequent idolatry of the Jews, which deserve to be considered,

ledge of Christian morality dwells no more with them than in the dens of savages.

It appears from some passages in the New Testament, and from other ancient writings, that the Disciples and their converts agreed to set apart for public worship the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, which was also the day on which he sent down the Holy Ghost upon his Apostles.

By setting aside the Lord's Day for the solemn worship of God, they observed all that was moral in the fourth commandment, namely a stated time for religious exercises; and they thought it proper to retain the same portion of time, one day in seven.

That from thenceforth the obligation to observe the Jewish Sabbath entirely ceased, is plain from the whole tenour of the New Testament:

For, first, we are taught by St. Paul that all ritual ceremonial laws, given to the Jews by positive appointment, were of no longer force after the promulgation of the Gospel.

Secondly, We find that contentions soon arose in the Christian churches, occasioned by some Jewish converts, who not contented with

^c Spencer, Vol. i. p. 94.

zealously

zealously observing the Law of Moses themselves, would compel the Gentile Believers to do the same. This controversy was not about the moral Law, the love of God, and of our neighbour, and the like duties: it was only concerning the ritual law. The Apostles meeting together on this occasion decided that the Gentiles were free from the law, and needed only to abstain from meats offered to idols, from things strangled, from blood, and from fornication. And since they made no mention of the Sabbath, it must be supposed to be comprehended amongst the rest of the ritual laws which the Gentiles were not bound to observe.

All the converted Jews indeed, the Apostles perhaps excepted, thought themselves not only permitted, but obliged to keep the whole Law, that is, as far as they could, as far as it was then practicable: nor did the Apostles interpose, but suffered them to follow their own judgment.

Thirdly, St. Paul warns the Colossians not to be seduced by those Christians who would compel them to be circumcised, and to keep the Law. He tells them that they had already received the spiritual circumcision in baptism,

tism, and wanted no other rites to make them complete Christians; that when they were dead in their sins God had quickened them by his spirit, having forgiven them their trespasses upon their faith and repentance; that Christ had blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances which was against them and contrary to them, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

By the hand-writing of ordinances, which was against them, he means the Ceremonial law, which separated the Gentiles from the Jews, as an unholy people.

Then the Apostle says; Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moons, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

From which words we learn that a Christian was not to be censured, if he observed no distinction in meat and drink, no new moons, Jewish feasts, Sabbaths, and the like:

That these were ceremonial ordinances against us, and contrary to us, which Christ abolished:

That these were mere shadows, of which Christ is the body; that is, that either they
were

were emblems and images of good things to come, exhibited by Christ; or else that they were as unsubstantial as shadows, compared to the solid and important truths which Christ had discovered, and consequently became useless under the Christian dispensation.

This suggests to us another end which the Jews discovered in the institution of the Sabbath. They were of opinion that it was intended as a type and a symbol of a perpetual Sabbath, or rest, to be enjoyed by the good in the world to come. Many of the Jews used to account several things in their law, as also the promises of temporal blessings, to be capable of an higher sense, and emblems of the rewards which the righteous should receive in the next life. It may be supposed that they were led into this way of expounding Scripture from observing, first, that God, whose goodness is supreme, would bestow better things upon his servants than those which usually fall to their share in this disorderly state; and secondly, that the difference between the condition of the righteous and the wicked was not such as might have been expected from the letter of the Law. These accounted the Sabbath, or day of rest, as designed to

to be an image of the future rest of the righteous from all their labours. To this opinion the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews alludes in the fourth chapter, though his expressions be somewhat obscure. The meaning of them seems to be this ; God made a conditional promise, says he, to the Israelites that they should enter into his rest ; and upon their disobedience declared that none of that generation should enter into his rest. What is the meaning of the words, *his rest*, or, *the rest of God*? We read that God rested the seventh day from his works, and instituted the Sabbath for a day of rest. Such a rest it was that God promised to them, that as he rested from his work on the seventh day, and as they also rested upon that day ; so they should enjoy a continual rest in the land of Canaan from the labours which they had undergone in Ægypt and in the wilderness. But this rest, such as it was, in the land of Canaan, a rest often disturbed and interrupted by wars and by other grievous calamities, could scarcely be reckoned a completion of God's promise to the good that they should enter into his rest. It was a type of another and a better rest, of an everlasting Sabbath in heaven, where the righteous should be

delivered from all the evils of life. This, says he, is the rest which God promised to the obedient Israelites by the mouth of David, long after they had obtained rest in the holy land. This is the rest which we Christians hope to enjoy, and should endeavour to secure.

Since then the Jewish Sabbath is abolished with the ritual law, and since in its stead the Lord's-day was observed by the ancient Christians, we may conclude that by keeping holy the Lord's-day we pay a due obedience to the moral and spiritual part of the fourth commandment. How we ought to observe this day, we may best learn from the ancient Jews, and from the first Christians.

The Jews, besides the temple at Jerusalem, had many Synagogues, where they constantly assembled on the Sabbath-days, to worship God, and where they heard the Law and the Prophets read and explained. The Christians, as a very ^d ancient Writer tells us, met together every Sunday, at which time portions of Scripture, says he, from the Old and New Testament were read, and discourses were made, to exhort them to piety; then they joined in

Justin Martyr.

prayer,

prayer, then they partook of the holy Communion, and lastly, they made collections for the poor.

The first Christians were so persuaded that this was an indispensable duty, that they observed it, not only in peaceable times, when they were permitted to make open profession of their faith, but in times of persecution, and at the hazard of their lives. The cruelty of Princes and Magistrates could not make them neglect it; for we find by their writings that they used to come together ^e before break of day, and in small companies, and in different places, when they could not meet openly and in great numbers.

Thus was the Lord's-day kept by the first Believers, whose example in this, as in some other things, is worthy of our respect and imitation.

There was a time when most of the serious persons in this nation entertained notions con-

^e They used, *stato die ante lucem convenire*, says Pliny, *Epist. x. 97.* Their meetings were rather *Cætus Antelucani* than *Cætus Nocturni*, and therefore by equitable construction did not violate the Roman laws against *Nocturnal Assemblies*. Nor indeed was it possible for poor labouring people to sit up whole nights at their religious assemblies, and to follow their several occupations in the day-time.

cerning the Lord's-day rather too ^f rigorous and precise, and leaning too much to a Judaical and ceremonial strictness. But many are now disposed to the other and the worse extreme, of neglecting that day, of spending the whole or a great part of it in worldly affairs, or of distinguishing it from other days only so far as to make it a day of idleness or of diversion.

That they who have given themselves up to vice and profaneness should shun the assemblies of Christians, is no wonder. Their behaviour

^f The Christians were not so strict in the time of the Emperor Constantine.

Omnes iudices, urbanæque plebes, et cunctarum artium officia, venerabili die solis quiescant. Ruri tamen positi agrorum culturæ libere licenterque inserviant: quoniam frequenter evenit, ut non aptius alio die frumenta sulcis, aut vineæ scrobibus mandentur; ne occasione momenti pereat commoditas cœlesti provisione concessa. *Cod. L. III. Tit. xii. 3.*

Compare this law with Virgil, *Georg. i. 268.*

Quippe etiam festis quædam exercere diebus
Fas et jura sinunt; rivos deducere nulla
Relligio vetuit, segeti prætere sepem,
Insidias avibus moliri, incendere vepres,
Balantumque gregem fluvio mersare salubri.

The Emperor Leo repealed this law, and published one more strict.

Scævola consultus quid feriis agere liceret, respondit, Quod omissum nosceret. *Macrobius, Sat. i. 16.*

in this, bad as it is, at least is consistent with the rest of their actions; and it is natural, for those who hate their duty, to avoid the places of public worship where they must hear disagreeable truths. But they who retain some regard to virtue and religion, and yet take little or no notice of a day set apart for their improvement in virtue and religion, are without excuse. If they will be judged by the practice of God's people under the Law, or of the Apostles and first Christians, they must stand condemned; or if they had rather appeal to the dictates of Reason, there also they will find nothing to favour them.

For if it be true that God sent his Son to give us laws, by which we should regulate our lives, and by which we shall be judged, it is equally true that we ought not to omit any opportunities of frequenting those assemblies where the divine precepts are taught by those who are appointed to that office, that so we may be instructed in those things on which our eternal happiness depends. This argument will reach the greater part of Christians, who stand in need of such instruction, that they may acquire right notions of Morality and of Christianity, and a due sense of their impor-

tance. Our duty is indeed easy to be known, so far easy, that it requires neither much learning, nor hard study, nor great abilities. A tolerable understanding, and an honest mind will suffice to attain all necessary knowledge: but some diligence and application is needful, and an use of the means which are afforded to us; we must worship God in private and in public, and read the Scriptures, and hear them explained.

If it be true that we are weak and frail creatures, disposed to be led astray by temptations, to be taken up with the things of this world, and to forget what relates to the next, sometimes persisting in a behaviour which we cannot approve, and sometimes treacherously deluding ourselves, it is equally true that we want to be reminded of those things from which we turn away our thoughts, to be excited to those duties which we know better than we practise, and to be continually exhorted, lest we be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Upon this account religious assemblies are absolutely necessary, where are set before us the obligations to live righteously, and the advantages of such a life, the pernicious nature and fatal consequences of sin, truths

truths which the wisest and the best person in the world wants frequently to hear, plain and obvious as they are, and truths which every person ought to hear with attention and respect, how imperfect soever be our discourses upon them. Such is the dignity of the subject, that we must sink beneath it; but such is its usefulness and importance, that it is scarcely possible to treat it seriously without saying something that must have a good effect upon a well-disposed mind.

If it be true that our meeting together at stated times for the solemn worship of God hath a plain tendency to make us live in the fear of God, to make us useful in our several stations, it follows that this is a duty to which we are bound, even for the sake of others.

If one were so well skilled in his duty, that he could hear nothing concerning it which he did not know before, and so perfect in the practice of it, as to stand in need of no exhortation, still it would be his duty to frequent these assemblies of Christians, that he might set a good example to his brethren, and encourage religion to the utmost of his power.

If it be true, as Solomon observes, that righteousness exalteth a nation, that virtue tends to make societies flourishing and powerful, here also is another reason for public worship, drawn from the public interest.

Lastly, There is no duty more frequently inculcated in the Gospel than benevolence, brotherly love, and charity. Upon this our Lord insists with a particular earnestness; by this, he says it should be known who are his disciples; thereby disowning all those who will not comply with it. Now there is nothing which seems more proper to promote and preserve union and friendship amongst Christians than the public worship of God.

We find in the Histories of Greece and Rome that [§] Lawgivers and founders of Governments,

[§] Lycurgus, Romulus, Tarquinius Superbus. See Dionys. Halic. Ant. Rom. ii. p. 93. iv. p. 250.

— ἵνα συνεχόμενοι εἰς τὸν ἀποδεχθέντα τρόπον, πανηγυρίζωσι, καὶ συνεσιῶνται. Dionys.

“ Let the Hebrews (says Josephus) assemble thrice a year, in the city where their temple shall be built, from all the territories which they possess, that they may return public thanks to God for benefits received, and implore the continuance of his favour; and that also by conversing and feasting together, they may be kindly disposed towards each other. For it becomes those who are of the same stock, and of the same religion, to keep up this social and friendly intercourse;

vernments, projecting to unite men collected perhaps from different nations, and to make them live as friends in one Common-wealth, thought

intercourse; which if they neglect, they may in process of time account one another to be mere strangers and aliens." *Antiq. iv. 8.*

§ 7.

These, in his opinion, were the reasons for which the Israelites were commanded to meet together three times a year. As the nation was divided into Tribes, each of which was in some respects a little commonwealth, there was cause to fear that they should fall out, and separate themselves into independent governments, and have a ruler and a religion of their own: and indeed in process of time they became two kingdoms, and idolatry and frequent wars ensued. So likewise amongst the Ægyptians, different objects of worship, and different religious rites in different parts of the kingdom, caused hatred and strife, and holy quarrels, and pious massacres. To prevent these evils, the Jews were enjoined to assemble together in one place, at stated times, to serve the Lord. The Ægyptians kept many stated festivals and religious assemblies in honour to their Gods, and held no less than six every year at different places. It is probable that this custom was of great antiquity, and observed when the people of Israel dwelt in Ægypt. Therefore when Moses went to Pharaoh, and asked leave for the Hebrews to celebrate a feast to the Lord, the Ægyptians could not pretend that it was an unreasonable request, since they accounted it a duty to do the like. This opens to us one reason why these festivals were appointed in the Law, namely, a compliance with the inclinations of the people, who doubtless were desirous to have their feasts, and their solemn assemblies, as well as the Ægyptians with whom they had long dwelt. The Law grants leave of absence to the females, and seems to intimate that it was more proper for them to stay away. The Ægyptians, when they repaired to their feasts, flocked together upon the Nile, in large companies, men and women, and many indecencies were

thought this to be the best expedient, to institute sacred rites and ceremonies which the people should observe, and to appoint stated assemblies, where after certain religious solemnities they were to partake of a common feast. It was supposed that this would unite the minds and affections of the people, would produce concord in time of peace, and would make them afraid and ashamed in time of war to act dishonourably and to forsake each other.

Whatsoever good effects might be expected, or did proceed from such political institutions, may with more reason be presumed to be the natural consequence of the public worship of God amongst Christians. As to the improvement of the heart, it is extremely manifest on which side the advantage lies. In the religious assemblies and ceremonies of the Pagans, religion, that is, piety and devotion was the least part, and all was usually transacted in such a manner, that it was rather amusing

were then committed, which this law seems to have intended to discourage and prevent.

See Le Clerc on *Exod.* xxiii.

Ἡ ἐν πολέμῳ δ' εἰς αἰδῶ καὶ πρόνοιαν καλεσθήσας ἕκαστον τῷ μὴ καλεῖσθαι τοὺς παρὰ τὴν πόλιν, ὃ καὶ συνέσπαιρε, καὶ συνέθισσε, καὶ κοινῶν ἱερῶν μετέσχε. Dionys.

than edifying. When we are assembled to appear before our Maker, nothing is wanting that is proper to inspire great and good sentiments, to exclude the frivolous cares and concerns of this life, and to raise the mind to heaven; all worldly distinctions cease, and we come as fellow-servants of the same God; we praise him for the common benefits which we receive from him; we pray to him, not for ourselves singly, but in general for all men, in particular for our brethren in the faith; we desire him to receive us hereafter into that kingdom where dwell peace and concord; we hear those divine precepts which we ought all to obey, and by which we must all be judged; and in partaking of the Lord's supper, we eat and drink together at the same table, as being all of Christ's family, and belonging to the same Master, who loved us with an equal and impartial love, and offers us the same promises and the same privileges.

One end for which the Lord's supper was instituted was to be to us a lively image of the union which ought to subsist among those who call themselves Christians, and which indeed subsists amongst those who are true Believers, as they are children of the same Father, servants

vants of the same Lord, members of the same society, heirs of the same inheritance, and parts of the same body of which Christ is the head. For this reason whosoever is not in charity with his brethren can have no pretence to appear at the Lord's table, and comes as an intruder, uninvited and undesired.

Thus much concerning ⁱ public worship, in frequenting which the due observation of the Lord's-day in a great measure consists.

From the foregoing observations it is easy to collect how it is to be kept by Christians, and what sentiments they ought to maintain about it.

We should reject all those notions which superstition and a zeal for trifles suggest, and take care not to oppress our minds with frivolous scruples, which may prove a great disturbance to us, whether we observe or whether we neglect them.

ⁱ Every national Church hath a power to set apart days for religious purposes, either of humiliation, or of thanksgiving. But this should be done sparingly and discreetly; else the Church may expect to find her children refractory, and like those mentioned in the Gospel, of whom it is said; We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

We should be very cautious not to overvalue our observance of the Lord's-day, not to think too well of ourselves upon that account. When we have done all this, and more than this, we are but unprofitable servants. Much more should we beware of that foolish and illusive imagination, that a regular attendance on public worship and a decent behaviour at it will atone for habitual sins, and that if we give a seventh part of our time to God, we may give the other six to folly and iniquity.

Setting aside such weak and deceitful notions, we should shew that respect to the Lord's-day, and employ it in that manner which ancient custom, and the laws of our own country, and the practice of sober and virtuous persons, and the rules of decency, and the duty of setting a good example, and the care of our own souls, require from us.

S E R M O N VI.

EXODUS xx. 12.

*Honour thy father and thy mother ; that thy days
may be long upon the land which the Lord thy
God giveth thee.*

MY subject and my text falls under two heads, and points out,

I. The duty of children to their parents, to which may be added the duty of parents to their children.

II. The reward which God hath graciously annexed to the observation of this law, namely, length of days and temporal prosperity.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

I. Almighty God thought it proper not only to insert this amongst his ten Commandments, but

but to insert it with particular and distinguishing marks of its high importance, and as a precept to which he required a singular regard.

The ten commandments may be and were probably divided into two parts; and they were written upon two tables. The first contains our duty to God; the second comprehends our duty to man.

After those which properly relate to God, and therefore have the precedence, this commandment stands at the head of the second table, as the most important. The first commandment of the first table requires us to honour our heavenly Father: the first commandment of the second table requires us to honour our earthly parents, as a kind of terrestrial Gods, appointed of God to bring us into the world, and to preside over us for our good. In this view the wise Romans seem to have considered parents: an obedient regard both to the Deity and to parents is in their language called *piety*; the same word serves for both these duties.

But it is not only the first and leading commandment of the second table; it is, as St. Paul observes, the first commandment to which God hath graciously annexed a particular recompense.

compense. “Children, says he, obey your parents, in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

Here is an obvious difficulty in St. Paul's observation.

The fifth commandment, says he, is the first with promise; and yet in the second commandment there is somewhat of a promise; “shewing mercy unto a thousand generations of them that love me and keep my commandments.” But we may consider this as only a promise at large, rather national than personal, rather general than particular. It is a declaration that the people of Israel, as a nation, should not fail to continue happy and flourishing, if they continued to serve God, and him alone. “Visiting the iniquities of the fathers, that is, of idolatrous fathers, upon the children to the third and fourth generation, and shewing mercy to thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

The precept of honouring parents is a precept which directly requires a duty; the others seem to be rather of the negative kind, and

forbid certain crimes; Thou shalt not do this, or that: and it is a remark of the Jewish writers that when God forbids, he threatens a punishment; when he requires, he promises a reward.

The duty here enjoined is the honouring of parents, and by it is principally required that children should entertain a sincere love and respect, and cherish a natural affection towards them; for this is the principle and the spring whence a suitable behaviour will certainly proceed.

Children are required to honour their parents, to be respectful in their behaviour to them, to assist them, to obey their commands, and to follow their directions in all things that are reasonable and contrary to no known duty; and in points which seem doubtful, to prefer the judgment of their parents to their own, to comfort them in afflictions, and to bear with their infirmities. In the duty of honouring parents is also included the duty of supporting and maintaining them if they are in distress, and unable to help themselves; which children are bound to perform to the utmost of their abilities.

The duty of submitting to the will of parents is a duty which relates chiefly to a state
of

of minority. When children are of age, the laws of nature and of nations allow them more liberty of judging and of acting; and revealed religion says nothing against it: but honour and respect are duties which ever continue in force.

That children should thus honour their parents, is a dictate of affection, of gratitude, of nature, of reason; and of common sense; and it is one of the laws which have been generally received by mankind for plain and important causes. If any society, any people have suffered it to be commonly violated by contrary custom, and have connived at such abominable practice, (and some such people we read of) we must not seek them in civilized regions, but in the clans of rude Savages, and amongst the most brutish, barbarous and profligate of human race, or else amongst nations degenerated and corrupted to the utmost degree.

The paternal ^a power, as it is the most ancient form of civil government, so in ancient times

^a *Senatoria potestas non liberat filium potestate patris sui. Digest. v. Tit. i. 18.*

The power of life and death was taken from fathers by Adrian perhaps, certainly by Severus Alexander. See Gothofred. ad *Cod. Theod. T. i. p. 363.*

times it was ^b very great, as it appears from the old Roman laws, and in the laws and customs of some other people : it was even a power of life and death. The only reason that could be offered in favour of such high privilege was, that fathers might well be trusted on account of that tenderness which they must have had for their off-spring. But arbitrary power is a dangerous thing ; and as there are too often undutiful children, there are sometimes unnatural parents.

The Law of Moses very wisely limited this excessive power ; for it is by no means fit that every master of a family should have a power of life and death over his wife, his children, and his domestics, though in different times and places such power hath been allowed to them. It encroaches too much upon the rights of society and the authority of the Magistrate, and it turns civil government into a multitude of little, disjointed, independent, tyrannical monarchies. But by the Law of Moses, if the children proved wicked and undutiful, the pa-

Ancient instances of fathers putting their children to death, are well known. Some modern examples may be found in Grotius. *Epist.* 83. and 166. *Part II.*

^b Bynkershoek, *Opusc. Diss.* 3.

rents

rents were to complain of them to the magistrates, and if the complaint appeared just, they were to be put to death. The method prescribed stands thus in Deuteronomy :

“ If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and who when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them ; then shall his father and his mother lay hold upon him, and bring him to the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place ; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice ; he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die. So shalt thou put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.”

This law was enacted by way of terror to bad children. It is to be supposed that it was very seldom put in execution, and that few parents could bring themselves to treat their children with such severity. But if either by the connivance of parents or of magistrates such crimes were not brought to light, God took the cause into his own hands, and declared such offenders to be cursed, and as such,

obnoxious to his wrath and to his judgments,
 “Curfed be he that fetteth light by his father
 or his mother: and all the people fhall fay,
 Amen.”

The Law of Mofes hath fecured and enforced paternal authority in many instances: the crimes alfo againft God and man are enumerated in it with fufficient accuracy, and proper punifhments are appointed for them; and yet, what hath been obferved concerning the laws of Solon and of Romulus, the firft an Athenian, the other a Roman Lawgiver, is alfo remarkable in the Laws of Mofes, namely that no^c mention is made of murderers of

^c “Father Le Comte tells us how want of duty in this particular is punifhed amongst the Chinefe, infomuch that if a fon fhould be known to kill, or fo much as to ftrike his father, not only the criminal but his whole family would be rooted out, nay the inhabitants of the place where he lived would be put to the fword, nay the place itfelf would be razed to the ground, and its foundations fown with falt: for, fay they, there muft have been an utter depravation of manners in that clan or fociety of people, who could have bred up among them fo horrible an offender. To this I fhall add a paffage out of the firft book of Herodotus. That hiftorian, in his account of the Perfian customs and religion, tells us, it is their opinion that no man ever killed his father, or that it is poffible fuch a crime fhould be in nature; but that if any fuch thing fhould ever happen, they conclude that the reputed fon muft have been illegitimate, fuppoſitious, or begotten in Adultery.” *Addifon, Spectator* 189.

fathers

SERMON VI.

119

fathers or mothers; as if it were impossible that any one could do so execrable a deed. But he who struck, or he who cursed his father or mother was to be treated as he who cursed God, and blasphemed his holy name; he was to be put to death. Afterwards, as iniquity abounded in the world, murderers of fathers and mothers, as St. Paul observes, were no uncommon criminals, and severe laws were enacted by the Romans and by other nations against such vile malefactors.

The fifth commandment not only requires to honour the father, but the mother also; an addition which many human laws seem to have neglected.

As the Laws were given to the Israelites with a view to keep them free from the crimes of their idolatrous and wicked neighbours, and from the iniquities of the Ægyptians with

^d — parietes perfoderis, vicinos compilaris, matrem verberaris.
Cicero Orat. in Vatin. 5.

Concerning the punishment due to those who should strike their mother, see Abramus, in his notes on the place.

Hic quibus invisi fratres, dum vita manebat,
Pulsatusve parens, et fraus innexa clienti, &c,
Inclusi poenam expectant.

Virgil Æn. vi. 608.

^e Præses — reverentiam debitam exhibere matri filios coget, &c.
Valerius et Gallienus Impp. See Cod. L. viii. Tit. xlviii. 4.

whom they had long dwelt, it is to be supposed that the moral duties were at that time scandalously neglected by those nations, and that the duty of obedience to parents, and particularly to mothers was as ill observed as the rest. The Egyptians, as we learn from ancient ^f History, were far from having right notions of it: for they held, first, that children had more obligation and should pay more respect to the father than to the mother; and secondly, that a son lay under no necessity to maintain his necessitous parents, but that a daughter was obliged to do it. Thus they compelled a woman, considered as a daughter, to assist and maintain her parents, and yet, as she was a mother, they took from her in a manner all authority over her own sons, which was absurd and unjust.

The precept of honouring father and mother shews by the way, that though the Law of Moses permitted divorce, it by no means encouraged it, and never intended that the Jews should carry it to those excesses in which they indulged themselves. For it was very hard, not to say impossible, for children to fulfill the fifth commandment, when wives were put

^f Clericus ad *Exod.* xx. 12.

away upon every flight occasion. How could a young person honour his father and his mother, when the father hated the mother, and dismissed her, perhaps for trifles, and brought a step-mother into the house? how could he perform his duty to both his parents? how could he behave himself in so difficult a situation? For this and many other reasons, our Saviour thought it necessary to put an end to these abuses by rigid prohibitions.

The Jewish government differed from all others in this, that God condescended to be the King of that nation; whence it followed that rebellion against God was high-treason, and the greatest crime against the State. Moses gave a very strict command upon this occasion, he says;

“If thy brother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, who is as thy own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, thou shalt not consent, neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thy hand shall be first upon him, to put him to death.”

But here observe that Moses says not, If thy father or mother entice thee. He seems not
to

to allow a son to bear witness against his parents and accuse them, no not even in cases of idolatry and treason.

The Scribes and Pharisees in the time of our Saviour did as such hypocrites have done ever since, they endeavoured to explain away and subvert the moral law, and to substitute something else in the room of it. They taught, amongst other absurd things, that if a man had once vowed or sworn that he would not assist and relieve his necessitous parents, he was in conscience obliged to do nothing for them, lest he should be guilty of perjury. Our Saviour says to them;

“Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your own tradition? For God commanded saying, Honour thy father and thy mother; and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free.”

§ Vassalage hath ever been an intolerable kind of servitude, and not to be admitted in a free country. A vassal took an oath to his Lord, that in his own person he would serve him, on all occasions, and against all persons whatsoever, except his own father. *Mem. de l'Acad. T. iv. p. 408.*

The meaning is this: A parent in distress asks relief of his son. The son replies, I vow to God that I will no more give you any of my money, than I would if I had consecrated it all to pious uses. After this declaration, what was the son to do? According to the decision of these Jewish Doctors, he was to keep his money, and to let his father starve.

This is the detestable doctrine which our Saviour hath exposed and censured; as in opposition to it he took care to confirm the authority of parents and the honour due to them. His Apostles also have commanded children to pay all obedience and submission to parents.

But here observe that this, like all other duties from man to man, is a relative duty, requiring a suitable return. As there is a duty from children to parents, so there is a duty from parents to children. This duty, as it appears from reason, from general consent, and from many passages of Scripture, is first, to check them if they do amiss, and restrain them from all that is prejudicial to their temporal and eternal welfare; secondly, to give them proper instruction and education; thirdly, to provide for their support and maintenance; and fourthly, to encourage them to well-doing, and
to

to prefer fair means and gentle usage to rougher methods, which may alienate their affections, and produce more harm than good. This is the meaning of St. Paul's precept to parents, not to provoke their children to wrath, that is, not to raise their passions, sour their temper, or break their spirits by unkindness and severity.

If these relative duties between parents and children be disregarded, wretched will be the condition of such offenders, and the ill effects will be felt throughout a nation. When many families are in this disorderly state, laws may be made, and Ministers may preach, and Magistrates may be active, and jails may swarm with criminals, and executions may be frequent; but the evil will not be so cured: it lies too deep for such remedies.

Our Saviour speaking of the last times, the times just before the destruction of Jerusalem, says that even children should rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death, and that parents should do the same to their children; and St. Paul, speaking of the same times, says that men should be without natural affection and disobedient to parents. This was also the state of the Romans in the days of the Apostles, and for an hundred years before.

before. Bad husbands and bad wives, bad parents and bad children abounded amongst them, especially amongst persons of rank and fortunes, and betraying and murdering of parents was a common thing; which was no wonder, since a disbelief of a Providence and of a future state, impurity, luxury, cruelty, revenge, ambition, avarice, bribery, robbing the public, and plundering of provinces appeared openly without fear or shame, and unnatural vices had expelled natural affections.

The dutiful behaviour of children to parents may be justly ranked amongst those things which St. Paul calls comely, beautiful, and of good report, universally approved and admired, not only in the Christian world, but by all reasonable people in all times. We read in ancient history of ^h sons, who for having signalized themselves in affection to their parents, for having saved their lives at the hazard of their own, in times of pressing danger, had divine honours paid to them by Posterity. And indeed this seems to have been one of the most pardonable instances of Pagan Idolatry, and like that of raising statues and temples to *Virtue*.

^h Amphinomus and Anapis.

Amongst other deplorable instances of the extreme depravity of human nature, and of the force of evil custom, one of the most signal is the barbarous cruelty of parents towards their own offspring. Not to mention the savage nations where parents sold their own children, or even devoured them; nor the superstitious nations, where they offered them in sacrifice to the Gods, an iniquity which even the Jews seem to have adopted in their most corrupt times; we find that even some civilized, learned, and polite people made no scruple of killing their infants, or of exposing them in the fields and highways.

May there not therefore be some instances in which the obedience of children to parents shall become no longer a duty?

For example; A child is exposed by the parents, and must inevitably perish, unless soon relieved. A charitable person takes him up, educates him, and puts him in a way to get an honest livelihood. In this case, I should think, the paternal rights and privileges are transferred from the natural parents to theⁱ adopting

ⁱ As the adopting of sons was a common practice amongst the Romans, when this adoption was made with the consent of the natural

ing person. He is the parent, in the moral sense, whom the child is obliged to honour, succour, and obey; and if in process of time the youth should discover his natural parents, he owes them no particular service, nor any thing more than what Religion requires from one man to another. For the rights of parents seem to arise principally, perhaps we might say, entirely, from treating their children as their children, from taking care of them during their weak and helpless infancy, and giving them education, instruction, and maintenance, to the best of their power and abilities.

But here observe that there is a great difference between a parent's doing his duty imperfectly, and his not doing it all. It is not an ordinary failure on the side of the parent that can cancel the obligations of the children; and certainly it is much better for them, in obedience to God's commandment, even to surpass the reasonable returns of honour and gratitude, than to fall short of them.

natural parent, of the adopter, and of the son, the paternal rights were in a great measure transferred to the adopter.

The laws of adoption are mentioned by Cicero, *Orat. pro Dom.*

II. And

II. And now I proceed to consider, secondly, the recompense annexed to the precept: Honour thy father, and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

This recompense is well adapted to the persons concerned; for as the love of life is one of our earliest passions, as it is usually strongest in youth, whilst fair hopes and pleasing days lie before us; so by a great condescension God treats young persons according to their own inclinations, and sets before them what they probably would have pitched upon themselves, if they had been left to their own choice. He offers them length of days, and consequently the conveniences of life, without which long life would be no blessing.

In the Old Testament, this and other temporal rewards are proposed to righteousness; and they are so often proposed, that it is needless to produce instances.

The doubt and the question is, Whether this reward was bestowed upon obedient children in the Mosaic dispensation; and whether it is to be expected under the Gospel? To clear up this difficulty, for a difficulty it is, I shall offer

a few remarks, which, I hope, may answer the purpose.

And first, I must remind you that the Jewish government was singular in this, that God was the temporal King of that people, and as such, enforced his laws with temporal rewards and punishments, which could not be distributed without a visible and miraculous providence. This was the state of the people from the days of Moses to the time when the nation rejected God's government, and desired to have a king set over them. God was offended at their request: he gave them Saul, and he withdrew in some measure his extraordinary interposition, which decreased as the sins of the nation increased.

Hence it may be supposed that from the days of Moses to the days of Saul an obedient behaviour to parents was remarkably rewarded with long life; but yet never so very strictly and invariably, as to admit of no exceptions; and such exceptions were indications of a future state of recompense, and shewed that temporal promises had a sublime and spiritual sense couched under them, and would be accomplished in another world. Thus

things stood under the Law. How stand they under the Gospel?

St. Paul seems to have thought that the promise of long life to obedient children was not cancelled by the clearer promises of eternal life under the Christian revelation. Honour thy father and thy mother, says he, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long upon the earth. He says not, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee; that belonged only to the children of Israel: but he says, that thy days may be long upon the earth; intimating that every person who should fulfill the precept had a title to the reward.

I say then that dutiful children have even now, though no absolute certainty, yet a reasonable hope of a long and prosperous life.

For first, the good providence of God is extended to all and each person, and acts secretly, silently and effectually, and often conveys temporal blessings to the righteous by ways and means not discernible and exposed to public view.

Secondly, there is a natural connection between obedience to parents and length of days;

S E R M O N VI. 131

so that, if no violent obstacles interpose, they will in the course of things go together.

Whence comes it to pass, that young persons neglect their business, keep bad company, give themselves up to vile courses, disoblige their friends, lose their reputation, run into debt, ruin their health, fly their country, get into jails, and there get jail-diseases of body and mind, and commit crimes which bring them to an untimely and ignominious death? This comes, as themselves often confess, from an undutiful behaviour to their parents, a contempt of their authority, and a neglect of their advice, entreaties, and reproofs.

Parents, usually speaking, though they have their faults, and have committed faults in the days of their youth, yet desire that their children should behave themselves well, and prosper in the world, that they should be modest, civil, sober, temperate, regular, and industrious; and children, who in these things obey their parents, take the best method to secure to themselves long life and prosperity.

Thirdly, The Scriptures exhort us to pray for each other, and frequently mention the

efficacy attending the supplications of the righteous. The dying prayers and blessings of Patriarchs and of other eminent persons were often prophetic, and fulfilled in their posterity. The Pagans had high notions of the prayers of parents for their children, and held them in reverence, as being remarkably effectual; they also accounted their imprecations to be of dreadful consequence, and thought that he who was cursed by his parents could never prosper. The text will bear a sense suitable to these opinions: Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long. It may be translated; that they may prolong thy days; that is, that by their prayers and blessings they may cause thy days to be lengthned.

But since under the Gospel, spiritual promises are more fully propounded, and all things temporal are represented as precarious, if long life should not always be the effect of a dutiful behaviour to God and to parents, it is to be considered that when a pious and excellent person dieth in the flower of his age, to such an one, to live is loss, and to die is gain; it is to depart hence and to be with the Lord,

4

which

which is far better. The conclusion therefore is, that Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come: of the life that now is, in all fair probability; of that which is to come, with absolute certainty.

which is the letter. The conclusion therefore
that it is Godliness is profitable unto all things,
having promise of the life that now is, and of
that which is to come; of the life that now
is, in all that we do, and of the life that is to
come, in all that we do.

S E R M O N VII.

EXODUS xx. 13.

Thou shalt not kill.

THIS commandment hath suffered much from two sorts of persons; from those who have interpreted it over-rigorously, and from those who have been too indulgent and relaxed in their notions concerning it, and have allowed themselves and others to commit actions which are certainly a transgression of the commandment.

Amongst the first sort we may reckon some ancient Christians, and some modern Sectaries, who have been of opinion that it is utterly unlawful for a Christian man to take away the life of another man, and by consequence that no Christian can with a safe conscience exercise the office of a soldier, of a judge in criminal

nal causes, and of a supreme magistrate; that murderers and other such offenders must not be punished with death; and that a man, even when he is assaulted, must not slay the aggressor in his own defence, and to save his life, or the life of his parents, his wife, his children, his friends, and his neighbours; and that war is absolutely prohibited under the dispensation of the Gospel.

If these notions were such as could fairly be collected from the doctrine of the New Testament, they would furnish a more plausible objection to Christianity than hath been, or will be made: for then it might have been said that Christ had destroyed the Law of Reason, and had built an impracticable visionary system upon the ruins of natural religion; that no kingdom could subsist upon such principles; and that Christianity was not calculated to be the religion of any country, but only of a few melancholy persons scattered up and down on the earth, separated from others, and tolerated by the great lenity and connivance of the civil governments to which they should belong.

The Christian Religion is not such; it supposes and takes for granted the Religion of Nature, and the just rules of civil society; it
speaks

speaks to men as to creatures endued with natural affections, reason, judgment, and discernment, and acting upon allowed principles of morality. The Gospel contains many general precepts, many strong expressions, many proverbial sayings, many universal affirmations and negations, which must be interpreted and limited by the rules of common sense, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and Scripture with reason.

God, when he gave men life, gave them an inherent love of it, and a right to preserve and defend it. Hence it is that whosoever unjustly and violently endeavours to take away the life of another, or the things absolutely needful for his subsistence and his comfort, as his liberty, his property, his wife and his children, forfeits his own life by the attempt, and may justly be killed, upon the fundamental law and principle of self-preservation. But as men entered into civil society for the common good, and as a man is often not a proper judge of the offences and injuries committed against him, and in his anger may carry his resentments too far, it hath been agreed upon in all wise and well-regulated governments, that each private person shall transfer his own rights into the hand

hand of the Magistrate, who, being supposed to be free from prejudice and partiality, is to punish offenders as the laws of the nation shall appoint. No man therefore may revenge himself, or kill the aggressor, when immediate self-defence doth not require it, and when he hath power and opportunity to deliver up his enemy to public justice.

Without this power of self-defence allowed to every private person, and this authority to punish malefactors, committed to the civil magistrate, there could be no such thing as government, or civil society. If wicked and malicious persons might assault, rob, cheat, ravish, plunder, and kill, and if good men were obliged to bear it all with patient submission, and to have recourse only to prayers, entreaties, and expostulations; if wicked Rulers might invade another country, unprovoked, and attack it with fire and sword, and the poor inhabitants were permitted to use no defence, such a form of government must soon and inevitably come to ruin: and therefore all interpretations of Scripture which authorize such gross absurdities are to be rejected with the contempt which they deserve, and are not entitled to a laboured confutation.

These are plain principles of nature and reason. If from these you go to the Jewish revelation, there you will find the rights of self-preservation, the rights of putting murderers, adulterers, and other notorious offenders to death, the rights of defending ourselves, our families, our religion, and our country, and of going to war with other nations upon just provocation, established by many instances.

If from the Law we proceed to the mild and spiritual Gospel of Christ, though it requires lenity, and patience, and forgiveness of injuries, yet it leaves the rights of mankind, the privileges of citizens and subjects, the authority of magistrates, and the civil government of nations, as it found them. It declares human Ordinances, and higher Powers, the powers of Princes and Magistrates, to be the power of God, because God approves of it, and is the God of order and regularity, and not of riot and confusion: it declares that they who are appointed by the consent of the people and by the laws of nations to preside and govern are ministers of God, who bear the sword for the punishment of evil-doers.

But if the commandment of God against the committing, and for the punishing of murder,
hath

hath been misrepresented and in a manner made of none effect by some weak and superstitious persons, who will not allow to Christian magistrates the right of punishing offenders with death, or to private Christians the right of self-preservation and self-defence; it hath suffered more from those who have been too relaxed and free in their notions concerning it, or too favourable to the irregular passions of men, or who have extended the power of taking away the life of others beyond all right and reason.

Whosoever shall consider impartially the laws of Christian nations, and compare them with the Mosaic Laws and with the whole tenor of the Gospel, will be obliged to confess that they are sometimes too severe and ^a sanguinary in multiplying capital crimes, and in pronouncing a sentence of death upon certain offences which might perhaps better be ^b punished with loss of liberty and property, and with hard labour.

Again; There have been Christians who have extended the right of self-defence too far,

^a Scriptæ, non atramento, sed sanguine.

^b This is a consideration of a public nature, which concerns those who are in authority.

and have supposed it lawful for a private person to kill an aggressor who attempts to deprive him by violence of the smallest part of his property, or who shall threaten him, or strike him. All this is directly contrary to that patience and forbearance required in the Gospel, which obliges Christians to bear with smaller injuries and submit to inconsiderable losses, rather than to take such methods of defence. It must be extreme necessity and danger that can justify the taking away the life of another.

We may observe, by the way, that the loose maxims of Casuists have done great wrong to Christian morality in general, and to every branch of it. A set of writers arose in the Church of Rome, who called themselves Casuistical Divines, and deciders of cases of conscience; and some of these men allowed so much indulgence to iniquity, that they gave just offence to serious persons even of their own communion. They taught men an art, which may properly enough be called the Art of cavilling and compounding with God, of doing as much evil and as little good in this life as they possibly could, without incurring damnation. A dangerous and frantic experi-
ment

ment for a man to make, where his soul and his eternal state are concerned!

Again; The wars which are continually waged by Christian nations are most notorious offences against this divine commandment, against the Law of Nature, against the Laws of God given by Moses, and against the Christian Religion, which forbids not only murder, but every disorderly passion, every vice which prompts men to commit murder. In all the wars which are waged, one side is in fault, and sometimes both; and in this case war is no better than robbery and murder, the guilt of which lies, I do not say upon the soldiers, but upon those in whose hands is lodged the power of declaring war. It is agreed by all wise and good Writers who have treated this subject, that the justifying causes of war ought to be very clear and manifest, and that nothing but extreme necessity can make it lawful and expedient; since upon all suppositions it is a dreadful calamity. The consequences of it are too well known, and too much felt. They are the desolation of populous and flourishing regions, the loss of trade, the increase of taxes and debts, poverty both public and private, the destruction of thousands, and the ruin of almost

most as many families, besides the sicknesses, the famines, the iniquities and cruelties which always accompany a state of hostility, and follow the camp. In such times, the more innocent, honest, peaceable, laborious, and useful members of civil society are often the greatest sufferers, and property by an unhappy circulation is transferred from the most deserving to the most undeserving hands.

But the state and the common practice of the Christian world in this respect, as in many other instances, shew too evidently that most of those who call themselves Christians are so by name only, and neither understand nor regard the Religion which they outwardly profess.

Few things have had a worse effect upon the minds and manners of men than the admiring and extolling those warriors, commonly called Heroes, who to gratify their ambitious views, and their other vices, have carried ruin and desolation far and wide; who deserve no more praise than an Earthquake, or a Pestilence, and who are true images of the Devil, of whom it is said that he goeth about seeking whom he may devour.

Another

Another notorious violation of this commandment is the custom of duelling, which hath been so long practised and so often tolerated in the Christian world. According to this custom, he who hath received an affront is to revenge himself, and to take away the life of the offender, or to lose his own in the attempt. This is directly contrary to the laws of the Gospel, and also an insult upon the laws of most nations which allow no such combats; and yet through the folly and pride of injudicious, thoughtless and wicked men, it hath been very prevalent. Such is the hard situation of many persons with relation to this senseless and detestable practice, that they may be said to live under laws quite inconsistent, forbidding and commanding the very same action: for on the one side, the law of Christ, and the law of the land condemn duelling, and account it to be murder; and on the other hand, the law of Custom and the law of Honour require it, under the penalty of disgrace and infamy. The only way to remove this hardship, and to cure this evil, would be for Christian nations to execute the laws of their own realms with exemplary strictness and uniformity, after due notice given of it, and not
to

to pardon any persons who are guilty of this kind of murder, and set religion and the government at defiance. Such justice and impartiality would soon conquer fashion, and custom, and honour falsely so called, things which are fickle in their own nature, and reducible to no real standard; and then great advantages would accrue to civil order, and to human society.

And here it may be proper to consider another sort of murder, namely self-murder, which whether it be a disease, or whether it be a crime, hath been frequent in this country.

The learned Pagans were divided in their opinions concerning it. Some thought it lawful; others, much wiser in this respect, condemned it, and urged against it this unanswerable argument, that man, as he is not the author of his own being, is not the master of his own life, that he is called into existence by the Creator, Father, and Master of all, and by him placed in the world, to act the part allotted to him, and to serve the important and wise ends of divine Providence; that he is like a soldier upon duty, and must not quit his post, till the Supreme Lord

judges it proper to give him his dismissal and release.

The holy Scriptures have no direct commandment against self-murder, unless we suppose it to be contained in the Law, Thou shalt not kill. But this silence affords no excuse for this crime, since every commandment and every exhortation in Scripture which requires from us a submission and resignation to God's holy will, reliance upon his promises, faith in him, and patience under affliction, is in reality and by plain consequence a prohibition of self-murder. The examples also of holy persons under calamities prove the same thing, and Job in the midst of all his sufferings, and the excess of his anguish, and when he earnestly wishes for death, never proposes to lay violent hands upon himself, and to take that method of ending his distress.

Christian writers have agreed in condemning self-murder; and some have looked upon it as upon an unpardonable sin, because, say they, in this case there is usually no room for repentance, and therefore none for divine mercy.

I would

* When the Remonstrants in Holland were persecuted by the Calvinists and by Prince Maurice, Ledenberg, Grotius, and other worthy

I would not warrant the justness of this inference. One would rather be inclined to think that it is not a single action, though the last action, and a bad one, that must determine a man's future state, but rather the whole of his conduct, as the good or evil of it shall predominate. It is certainly a crime very heinous and dangerous, when it is the last voluntary act of an ill-spent life, when he who is guilty hath brought himself into distresses by his own fault, and hath made his existence a burden to him by a course of folly and iniquity, hath lost all practical notions of God and religion, and given the reins to his passions, and inflamed them to such a degree that he can bear no disappointment. But in our country, where spleen and melancholy, and lunacy abound, the far greater part of worthy men were flung into prison, and there threatened to be put to the rack.

"The sad end of Ledenberg, who, as it was thought, to avoid the tortures of the rack, laid violent hands upon himself, after having frequently prayed to God, thus finishing his days in an unlawful manner, was lamented with tears by many, especially by those of the Remonstrant party, who always greatly esteemed him." *Brandt, ii. 532.*

He must be as barbarous as those Persecutors were, who would rashly pass a sentence of reprobation upon this unfortunate and religious man.

those unhappy persons, who thus end their days, have a disordered understanding, and know not what they do: and in all dubious cases of this kind, it is surely safer and better to judge too favourably than too severely of the deceased; and our Juries do well, to incline, as they commonly do, on the merciful side, as far as reason can possibly permit; and the more so, since by the contrary verdict the family of the dead person may perhaps suffer much, and have sorrow upon sorrow, and loss upon loss.

Another transgression of this commandment, and the last which we will consider, is the allowing of sanctuaries to be a refuge and protection to murderers. The veneration which serious persons of all religions, Pagans, Jews, and Christians, have entertained for places consecrated to the Deity and to pious uses, gave encouragement to this superstition; and it was usual for offenders and criminals, and for persons in danger and distress to fly to altars, temples, and sacred places for shelter. This indulgence, so far as it might serve to protect a man from immediate revenge, and to procure him a fair trial, was not amiss: but it became too often a public nuisance. In the
Christian

Christian world, as the Church grew powerful, wealthy, and corrupted, it used every artifice to increase its own dominion and authority, and to encroach upon the rights of the Civil Magistrate; and they who fled to Churches and Religious Houses were screened and sheltered, what crimes soever they had committed. It hath been no uncommon thing in Popish countries for Ruffians to assassinate passengers in the streets, and then to run into the next Church, and get out of the reach of justice. Such privileges and privileged places are destructive of all good government, and a wicked insult upon laws divine and human. To such practices may well be applied that severe rebuke of our Saviour; It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves, and of assassins. And here it may be observed that the same places which have been a shelter to the vilest offenders, have been so likewise to the most senseless and pestilent errors, which when they have once taken sanctuary in that Church, are not to be dislodged, but remain there for ever.

I shall now add a few remarks upon the punishment due to murder.

The first offender was Cain, who slew his brother. The punishment which God inflicted upon him was to depart from the presence of the Lord, from the abode of his father and mother, where God used to manifest himself, and to be a vagabond and a fugitive.

From the most ancient Records of history, we find that exile was often the punishment of murder, and even of accidental and undesigned murder, or man-slaughter. When a man had killed another, he fled and hid himself, to escape the wrath of the relations of the deceased. Sometimes he compounded with them, and paid a fine; but if no such composition could be made, or would be accepted, he was obliged to live in banishment.

In the old World, when violence and bloodshed, and every kind of iniquity had defiled the earth, God destroyed that incorrigible generation, reserving only Noah with his family, to be the father of a new race. At this time God judged it proper to enact a very strict law against murder, and to make it
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it a capital crime: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

In the Mosaic dispensation, the same law is given, and is often repeated and enforced: "Thou shalt not kill. He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall surely be put to death. If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die. Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death: but he shall surely be put to death. So shall ye not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land; and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."

In the Law of Moses, even manslaughter, accidental and undesigned, was attended with grievous inconveniences, and the man was obliged to fly to a city of refuge, and might be killed if he was found elsewhere.

The Christian Religion leaves nations to the Law of Nature, and to their own civil institutions and customs, so far as they are not immoral, and doth not establish any new

system of government. As to murder, Christian nations have agreed to make it a capital crime.

It may be thought that the precept given to Noah and his sons, and afterwards to the Jews, that every murderer be put to death, being not a ceremonial or political, but a general and a moral law, is of perpetual and indispensable obligation, and consequently that Christian Governments have no power to deviate from it, and must punish every murderer with death. On the other hand, it is to be considered that the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of clemency and mercy, and that, like its Author, it leaves space for pious sorrow, repentance, and amendment, unless the welfare of civil society absolutely interposeth, and then clemency to one would be cruelty to the community. To this it must be added that the taking away the life of another in the way which the Law calls murder, is an offence that may be attended with a variety of circumstances aggravating or extenuating the guilt. It is therefore proper that the supreme Magistrate should have a power lodged in his hands to mitigate the
rigour

rigour of the law, when the case is favourable and pitiable, and when strict justice would willingly give place to equity. I need not add that it is his duty, in the exercise of this privilege, to act uniformly, and without excepting of persons. Nothing is more evident and undeniable.

It is not necessary to shew that murder is an offence of the most heinous kind: it is well known and acknowledged. I shall only observe that our Saviour, in his exposition of this commandment, hath forbidden and condemned all those injuries against our neighbour which tempt and impel us to the commission of this crime. The law says, Thou shalt not kill: our Saviour adds, that we are no less obliged to abstain from causeless anger, contemptuous insolence, reviling language, rash judgment, confirmed hatred, rancour, malice and enmity, calumny and slander, broils and contention.

The causes of committing murder are usually reducible to these, either to coveting another person's possessions and attempting to deprive him of them, or to furious anger, strife, and quarrels. Both are strictly forbidden

den by the Gospel, which wisely endeavours to secure our obedience by shutting up the avenues to grosser iniquities, and by restraining the inordinate passions and irregular motions of the mind at their rise, and in their infancy, before they gather strength, and break out into acts of outrageous violence.

There are things which are as dear and as important to a man as his life, namely, his moral character and reputation, his health, his peace of mind, his liberty, and the prosperity of his family. He who deprives another of these things may be considered as a murderer, in the moral sense. Whosoever is at enmity with his neighbour, and hath been the aggressor, must not hope to compensate for it by any acts of devotion, and of piety, of piety falsely so called; for he who says he loves God, and hateth his brother, is a liar, and a murderer, as the Apostle assures us. "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remembrest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Thus much may suffice concerning the sin of murder. It is a dreadful thing to consider how frequent this crime hath been amongst us. New laws have been made in our days, with a view to restrain it: but the evil lies deep, and more must be done to reform the morals of the people, before we can expect any considerable alteration for the better.

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S E R M O N VIII.

EXODUS xx. 17.

Thou shalt not covet—any thing that is thy neighbour's.

THE tenth and last commandment may be considered,

I. First, as forbidding a crime of an extensive and complicated nature, the crime of coveting :

II. Secondly, as having a respect, more or less, to all the foregoing commandments of the Second Table, as securing and enforcing a due regard to them, and condemning that temper and those actions which lead to the violation of them.

I. First, The crime here forbidden is coveting the property of another person ; and of this
covet-

coveting or concupiscence there are three degrees; first a simple desire, secondly a violent passion, and thirdly an evil disposition breaking out into evil designs and attempts, which though unsuccessful, yet are criminal.

The beginning of coveting is a simple desire. When a man considers and contemplates an object that is useful, pleasant, convenient, and alluring, an object of which he is deprived, and which another person possesseth, a wish will perhaps arise that he were the possessor, and he will say to himself, It would be better for me if I had such things, and my neighbour who hath them is in a much happier condition than I am.

This simple wish, unpremeditated, and almost involuntary, and carried no farther, may perhaps deserve rather to fall under the name of a weakness than of a crime. And yet there is something mean, and silly, and irregular in it; and Reason and Religion teach us that we ought to restrain and check it in its rise. The better and the wiser a man is, the less he will be troubled with frivolous desires of this kind. Equanimity, contentment, reliance upon God, and resignation to his providence, are virtues which directly tend to subdue and to suppress such

such impertinent thoughts. Such thoughts, though they may not imply any confirmed depravity, shew that the mind is not in a due situation; even as a sluggish heaviness, a degree of heat more than usual, and an unequal pulse, though it be not a fever, yet is not a proper disposition of body, and a state of health.

But, secondly, such wishes, like bad seed sowed in the mind, are apt to take root, and to bring forth evil fruits. When they have been long indulged and frequently repeated, they produce a fretful uneasiness, and are transformed into a restless passion, and a continual discontent; and then the mind is off of its guard, and delivered up to irregular dispositions. The man is dissatisfied with his condition; the blessings and conveniences which he enjoys, he flights and overlooks with base ingratitude; the things which he cannot obtain he over-rates and admires too much; the persons who possess what he wants are the objects of his envy, and in some degree of his aversion.

Such a temper is very remote from a sober regard to the precepts of reason, to the will of God, and to the social duties; for whosoever will be a good man, and a good citizen, should keep not only his hands, but his eyes and his heart

heart from the possessions and the property of others.

From this distempered state of mind an easy step is made to unwarrantable actions, to the laying base projects and evil schemes with a view to defraud and injure others, and to obtain the things which are coveted, as far as it can be done with impunity, and without falling under the correction of human laws. And this is properly the crime which stands condemned in this tenth commandment; a commandment, which as we shall shew, secondly, hath a respect, more or less, to all the foregoing commandments of the Second Table, securing and enforcing the obedience which is due to them, and condemning those dispositions and actions which directly lead to the violation of them.

II. The fifth commandment says, Honour thy father and thy mother; a precept upon the due observance of which the happiness of individuals and the prosperity of civil society in no small measure depend, and which God hath honoured with singular promises of approbation and recompense. Now, not to covet the things of another, is a law which bears some relation to this commandment, and affords assistance to the practice of it: for the
ungrateful

ungrateful and undutiful behaviour of young persons to parents often arises from coveting their possessions, and not being contented with that part of it which they receive. Hence ariseth an impatience and a disrespect on the one side, and a grief and resentment on the other, and the amiable and powerful bonds of natural affection are weakened, and perhaps quite broken.

The sixth commandment forbids murder; and if you consider by what evil dispositions and by what motives men are led to this last act of villainy, you will find them usually reducible to these two; either to ungoverned anger and malicious resentment, or to the love of unlawful gain, and the desire of unlawful acquisitions. So that he who is contented with his own, and covets nothing to which he hath no right, is secure from one of the pressing temptations which drive needy and profligate persons into this heinous crime.

The next commandment is of the utmost consequence to the peace of families, and to the welfare of society, and forbids an iniquity most odious in the sight of God, an offence which all human laws condemn, but which they do not always punish as strictly as it de-

serves: Thou shalt not commit adultery. By the Law of Moses, death was the punishment of adultery; and restitution, with a fine, was the punishment of theft. But in Christian nations, I know not how and wherefore, this rule is inverted, and it is safer to commit adultery than to steal; though surely it ought not to be so.

To guard and strengthen this important law, the tenth commandment says, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife; by which men are forbidden to give encouragement to a criminal passion, or to use any methods tending to satisfy it, though the endeavours should prove ineffectual. Such were an attempt to alienate the affections of husband and wife from each other; for as amongst the Jews divorces were frequent, artifices of this kind might be frequently put in practice by wicked persons. All such evil deeds were forbidden by the law, Thou shalt not covet; which therefore lays a greater restraint upon men than the foregoing commandment against adultery, and requires an innocence of heart and thought, securing men from all approaches and all attempts to do this irreparable injury to their neighbour. And indeed the law itself against adultery should be considered

considered as forbidding indirectly, and by way of consequence, fornication and all impurity, as immoral in itself, and directly leading to the practice of adultery; even as the commandment against murder may be justly supposed to forbid all cruel usage of another, which may be as effectual to shorten his days and deprive him of his life as murder itself.

The eighth commandment says, Thou shalt not steal. When a man by right of inheritance, or by his own industry, by fair and honest means hath gotten a maintenance, it is highly fit that he should enjoy it, and that none should deprive him of his possessions. Let^a theft and robbery be generally practised in any nation, and tolerated, and permitted to enjoy connivance and impunity, there will be an end of all labour, commerce, and diligence, and such a nation will become a riotous collection of free-booters and assassins, living upon spoil and plunder.

The Ægyptians, with whom the Israelites had so long dwelt, were great cheats, thieves, and pilferers, as their neighbours the Ish-

^a The Lacedæmonians permitted theft, and the art of thieving; but their form of government was in many respects not only singular; it was absurd.

maelites or Arabians were robbers and plunderers, and are so to this day. The Israelites had in all probability learned the vices of the Ægyptians, and therefore it was the more necessary that theft should have a place amongst the more heinous crimes condemned in the Ten Commandments. The Ægyptian government made laws against theft, laws not the most rigorous and severe, calculated rather to curb and restrain it than to extirpate it; for the nation was so addicted to this vice, that if they had destroyed all the guilty, the country must have been depopulated. The Law of Moses also, as we observed, doth not punish it as rigorously as several other transgressions.

To confirm and corroborate this law against theft, the tenth commandment adds, Thou shalt not covet; which extends itself much farther, and condemns all evil practices approaching to the nature of theft, or of robbery; for there are various ways of wronging our neighbour, as cheating, defrauding, detaining, deceiving, over-reaching, extorting, and taking a mean advantage of his ignorance, his necessity, his carelessness, his good temper, his hopes or fears, to make a profit of him. These and all oblique arts of imposing upon others,

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as they are not direct theft and robbery, so they usually lie out of the reach of human laws, and escape the punishment which they well deserve. But they are all condemned by that general precept, Thou shalt not covet : and he who observes this rule, and is free from coveting, will keep himself free from the faults above-mentioned.

The ninth commandment says, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour ; a crime of a most odious and pernicious nature. It tends to banish from society all regard to truth, and all confidence which men can place in each other, to distress and mislead Courts of Judicature, to protect and reward the guilty, to condemn and oppress the innocent, and to establish practical Atheism, by profaning the name and despising the authority of God.

The Law of Moses, as it here condemns this crime, so in other places it inflicts upon it a very suitable punishment, namely, retaliation. He who by a false testimony would deprive another of his liberty, his property, or his life, is to suffer the same evil which he would unjustly bring upon his neighbour. This also was a law of the Ægyptians, and of other na-

tions ; but it is so reasonable that it may be accounted a law of nature, and the voice of humanity and of common sense.

Of bearing false testimony there are two kinds. The first is wilful, deliberate, and malicious perjury, for which hardly any punishment can be thought too severe, and where the sentence of retaliation is very just. The second is when the witness is in an error, and swears to some falsehood, thinking it to be true. This is undoubtedly a fault which may be greater or lesser according to the circumstances. A witness however should be absolutely certain that the fact is true which he attests, or he should abstain from giving evidence, or he should give it as a point concerning which he is dubious, and may be mistaken.

With this commandment the command against coveting hath a close connection ; for if you consider all the perjuries, the subornation of evidence, and false testimonies in all times and places, you will find that the far greater number of those who commit this wickedness are hired, bribed, or enticed by lucre, and do it because they covet the things to which they have no right, and which they would purchase at any rate. He therefore who religiously ob-
serves

serves the law against coveting, will be secure from the most dangerous and prevalent temptation to wrong his neighbour by false testimony.

But the commandment against bearing false witness is very extensive, and not only comprehends all lying testimonies given upon oath, but all false accusations, all calumny, and defamation, and detraction, open or secret.

Thus much may suffice to explain the last commandment, and to shew its connection with those of the second Table.

I shall now conclude with a review of the commandments, and with some farther remarks upon them in general.

The Ten Commandments cannot be said to be a complete body of religion and system of morality, nor even to contain the substance of the Mosaic Law.

They may rather be accounted a rough draught, and the out-lines of man's duty, and they were principally intended to condemn those more heinous transgressions, which, if tolerated would destroy all religion, and subvert civil society. Take these commandments according to the letter and strict meaning of the words, and you will not easily find in them

the duties of piety, resignation, prayer and thanksgiving ; those of patience, charity, and humanity towards men ; those of sobriety and modesty, the regulation of the passions, and the improvement of the heart and mind. Some of these precepts are peculiar to the Jews, as the Law of the Sabbath, together with the promise of happiness in the land of Canaan, and they concern not other people, except indirectly, and by way of inference.

But as our Saviour, having occasion to mention some of these laws, hath improved and enlarged them, and given them a more sublime and a more extensive meaning, we may consider the Ten Commandments as so many general heads, under which several particular duties may be ranged, and to which they may fairly be applied. Let us then take a review of them in this manner.

The first commandment in the Mosaic Law enjoins the worship of one God ; to which the Gospel adds, that as there is one God and Father of all, so there is one Lord and Mediator, and one sanctifying Spirit, one Church of Christ, one Faith, one Rule, and one Hope of Christians. Hence we are reminded of that unity which ought to be preserved amongst

Believers; an unity, not of opinion in doubtful, obscure, and controverted points, for that is impossible; but such an unity as love and charity, and forbearance, and condescension, and meekness, and quietness will produce in virtuous minds.

The Second Commandment forbids Idolatry, and by consequence every thing that borders upon it, and which tends to withdraw us from our trust in God and in Christ. Such is not only the worship of false Gods, but of Angels, Images, Saints, and Reliques; and to this precept is justly to be added every inordinate and blind affection towards visible objects, and things temporal and transitory. The voluptuous, the ambitious, the covetous man is in a figurative, and yet in a true sense, a meer idolater. Wealth, Power, and Pleasure are the false Gods, which have been and are more adored, more devoutly served and worshiped, than any idols or images whatsoever, and have extended their dominion over the face of the earth. Whosoever gives up his heart to them, and placeth his trust in them, is in the sight of God an apostate and practical unbeliever, notwithstanding all his professions to the contrary.

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From the first and the second Commandment we may collect that God is an all-perfect and spiritual being, and as our Saviour adds, is therefore to be worshiped in spirit and in truth; and thence may be deduced that part of our duty to God which is properly called piety, as faith, hope, gratitude, love, reliance, resignation, prayer, and thanksgiving, a conformity to his will, and an endeavour to imitate his perfections.

The Third Commandment forbids to take the name of God in vain; by which not only perjury is condemned, but swearing upon trivial occasions, and all loose and profane conversation. A serious reverence for God, for his holy name, and for things sacred and religious, is the indispensable duty of every man upon the principles of natural religion, and much more under the Christian covenant.

The Fourth Commandment, which requires the observation of the Sabbath, if interpreted according to the letter, is a law peculiar to the Jewish nation; but by the fairest inference Christians may collect from it that man ought not to spend, or rather to mis-spend all his time on his worldly concerns, but set apart some portion of it for religious exercises and
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the improvement of his heart; that in compliance with the most ancient practice of the Christian Church, in obedience to the laws of his country, and even for the sake of good example, he ought to shew a decent respect to the Lord's-day, and attend the public worship of God.

This commandment also, interpreted in a moral and a sublimer sense, reminds us that good men always expected a better state than this world can afford to its inhabitants; that the Sabbatic rest required of the people of Israel, and the rest which was promised to the obedient in the land of Canaan, were figures and representations of an eternal rest in heaven from the troubles and labours of this life. The foresight and expectation of this future rest is the only solid comfort in affliction, the only sure foundation for resignation and contentment here below.

The Fifth Commandment, which requires that parents be honoured and obeyed by their children, may be extended by parity of reason to all those who as they act the part of parents towards other persons, so they deserve to receive the affection, gratitude, love, respect, obedience and assistance, and all kind offices
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due to parents. Hence it hath come to pass that one of the most ancient titles of reverence paid to kings, to magistrates, to priests, to prophets, to teachers, to masters, to benefactors, and to elders, was, to be called Fathers. Flattery, and slavery, and modern courtesy, and absurd politeness have introduced other titles, more pompous perhaps, but less amiable and less significant: for to call a man, Lord, is to express a fear of him; but to call him, Father, is to express a love for him, and no more fear than is consistent with love. And certainly, since God himself hath accepted this name, and hath directed us to call him Our Father, we cannot, as far as words will go, honour any man more than to give him the same title. Even the greatest Monarchs have affected to be called, Fathers of their country, though perhaps they have not often deserved the compliment, but have rather been such fathers as the Heathen God Saturn, or as some Savages who^b eat or sell their own children. However, it was not amiss to give this title to every Prince who desired it, since it might serve to remind

^b Δημόσιος βασιλεύς. Homer.

him, if not of what he was, yet of what he ought to have been.

Our Saviour calls his Disciples his children, and the Apostles in their Epistles represent themselves as spiritual fathers, and the Christians whom they had converted and instructed, as their children. Such was the light in which they desired to appear, and such the station in which they chose to act, and such the authority which they claimed and exercised, not temporal authority, government, and dominion, but the gentlest of all powers, exercised with affectionate tenderness. They would not accept even the submission and the obedience of Christians, unless it were accompanied with love, and proceeding from a willing mind.

The Sixth Commandment is against murder. The Gospel hath secured and guarded this law, by forbidding all wrath and malice, hatred and revenge, all abusive and reviling language, as so many incentives to violence, and to bloodshed.

The next Commandment is against adultery, and hath been extended by the precepts of Christianity, so as to forbid all impurities, and to discourage and dissuade polygamy, and divorce

force also, except in the case of adultery, or of crimes equally heinous and insupportable.

The Eighth Commandment forbids theft and robbery. To this law may be referred all those precepts which require of us to do no injury to our neighbour, nor to deprive him of his fortunes, his reputation, his health, his happiness, and his peace of mind; but on the contrary, to do him all the services that lie in our power, and that he can equitably expect and desire from us.

The Ninth Commandment, against bearing false witness may justly be supposed to require an abhorrence of lying, deceiving, and slandering, and an inviolable regard to truth, sincerity, impartiality, fidelity, justice and equity.

The last Commandment, which forbids us to covet the things of our neighbour, hath been the subject of this discourse; and no more needs to be added concerning it.

These Ten Commandments are to be divided into two parts, into those of the first, and those of the second Table, into our duty to God, and our duty to man. The first is comprised in this one law, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart: the second is reducible to this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour

bour as thyself. And whosoever duly observes these two great commandments, cannot easily be deficient in performing his duty to himself.

The first of these commandments, or the love of God, is the law of piety : the second, or the love of man, is the law of charity. He therefore who in any point deliberately and habitually offends against his duty to God, breaks the whole law of piety ; and he who in the same manner offends in any instance against his neighbour, breaks the whole law of charity. And in this sense St. James may be understood, when speaking of the duty of man to man, he says ; whosoever breaks one of these commandments, though he should observe the rest, violates the whole law ; namely, the law of benevolence and charity.

This love of God and of our neighbour is neither an impetuous and blind passion, nor a mere speculation, but a good disposition produced and cultivated by reason, strengthened by faith, and verified by our actions. To love God is to keep his commandments ; and to love men is to do them all the service and all the good that we can. Let us intreat the Giver
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of every good gift, that he would have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep these Laws.

S E R M O N IX.

PSALM cxlvii. 19, 20.

He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments, they have not known them.

THIS is the conclusion of a Psalm of thanksgiving, in which God is celebrated for his power shewed in acts of loving-kindness, and particularly for the revelation which he had made of his will to the Jewish nation, and for the excellent laws which he had given them, by which favours they were advantageously distinguished from other nations.

That Law which God delivered to his own people, and for which just returns of praise are here made to him, shall be the subject of

our present inquiries, particularly the end and design of it, and its perfections, and also some defects in it which the Christian revelation hath enabled us to discover.

From the Scriptures we learn that God chose the children of Israel, as he had promised to Abraham, to be his peculiar people; that he miraculously rescued them from slavery; that he gave them the quiet possession of a fruitful country; that he wrought many wonders for their preservation; that he delivered precepts to them, the observance of which necessarily separated them from other people; that he raised up a succession of prophets to instruct or correct them; that he ruled over them himself in a singular manner, giving evident signs of his presence in the tabernacle, and in the temple, answering them when they consulted him, making them prosperous whilst they served him, correcting them by temporal calamities when they forsook him, and receiving them into his favour and protection upon their repentance and amendment. After he had preserved them a distinct people for more than fourteen hundred years, he sent his Son to them, who was born amongst them, and came to make a new and a better covenant, to which
both

both they and all other nations should be invited, and to teach a more pure and spiritual religion.

This Messias was obscurely represented in their religious ceremonies, and promised in the Law and the Prophets ; and as the time of his coming approached, the predictions concerning him were more full and clear.

If we consider the Law as intended to instruct the Jews in moral truths, and to keep up the worship of God in the world, we may observe that these ends were sufficiently secured.

When we look into the state of the Gentile world, before the coming of Christ, we find not only barbarous and savage people, but nations famous for arms and arts, for politeness and philosophy, strangely mistaken in religion, entertaining doubts and wrong notions both of the divine nature, the object of religion, and of their duty to God : whilst we find the Jews, a nation separated from other people, and perhaps not equal to many of them in polite arts and learning, yet in religious knowledge far surpassing the rest of mankind. This we must ascribe to the discoveries which God made to them of his will. From the Books of Moses they might learn that there was one God,

maker of heaven and earth, who alone was to be worshiped; that he was most wise and powerful, most just and good; that though he would by no means clear the guilty, yet he was the Lord, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; that they must love him with all their heart and soul, and their neighbours, that is, their countrymen, as themselves, and shew equal kindness to the stranger that dwelt among them. In a word, God gave them in the Two Tables, and in the laws added to them, just notions of himself, and a system of morality, which in equity, charity, humanity, and many other respects, surpassed what could have been collected from the laws of other nations.

From the Law and the Prophets the Jews might learn that God did not so much delight in ceremonial observances, as in piety, justice, and charity; from many expressions in them they might suppose and hope that a quiet possession of the land of Canaan was not the only reward of well-doing, but that God reserved for those who loved him a better recompense in a better world. In those Books they might find

find descriptions of God's goodness and mercy proper to raise their trust in him, and to encourage them to amendment and repentance, gracious promises of pardon, and a promise of future blessings, of which the Messias should be the author and dispenser; which may be said to belong rather to the Gospel than to the Law, and to be founded upon all that Christ did and suffered for mankind.

And as good laws naturally tend to make good subjects, and a good religion to make good men; so the lives and behaviour of some Worthies recorded in Scripture are witnesses to the excellence of the religion which they had received, and by which they were guided. They were remarkable for piety to God, and for a disinterested love of their country, they preferred their duty to all worldly advantages, and endured with patience cruel persecutions, even to death, for the sake of a good conscience.

Another end of the law, was to preserve the people of Israel distinct and separated from all nations. Many precepts were appointed for this very purpose. "I am the Lord your God, who hath separated you from other people: ye shall therefore put difference be-

tween beasts clean and unclean." That having a diet peculiar to themselves, they might be restrained from eating with the Gentiles, and so from learning their idolatrous and vitious customs.

The Law may be divided into the moral and ceremonial. The moral law was the law of Nature; the ceremonial law consisted of the various ordinances, purifications, offerings, sacrifices, observations of days, celebrations of feasts, contained in the Books of Moses. God required an equal obedience to the moral and to the ceremonial law; he enjoined the observation of each in general, with the same strictness, and under the same penalties.

The Scripture hath recorded instances of severe judgments, which followed the transgression of certain rites and ceremonies; and these offences seem to have been flightier than some immoralities, which yet received not the same degree of punishment.

When we consider that the ceremonial is far beneath the moral law in use and dignity, and that it contains many precepts and statutes which have no intrinsic value, and seem rather to be a burden than a blessing, we may wonder that God should have chastised the neglect

glect of it with so great rigour, or that he should have required so strict an observance of it. But, first, such corrections were the more necessary for that very reason. Because the ceremonial was burdensome, and less excellent than the moral law, it might have been despised and rejected, if they who brake it had not sometimes been made examples to deter others; and secondly, how unprofitable soever it might be in its own nature, it was instituted for profitable ends.

The reasons for which God established it are supposed to have been these:

First, To preserve the people from idolatry, to which they had shewed themselves prone, and to which they had strong temptations, being surrounded with idolaters. Numerous ceremonies therefore were enjoined, which would constantly occupy them in the service of God:

Secondly, In condescension, in compliance with their weakness and prejudices, their love of pomp and shew and ceremony. Therefore amongst their ritual precepts there were some which probably had been observed by the Egyptians with whom they had dwelt, and

to which they themselves had been accustomed:

Thirdly, To cut off all intercourse between them and their superstitious neighbours, by appointing some religious ordinances directly opposite to those of the Pagans:

Fourthly, To remind them of the purity and holiness of which their rites and ceremonies were figures and emblems, to teach them that they who were separated from all nations to be the peculiar people of God were obliged to keep themselves free from the pollutions of the Gentiles, and to be holy, as the Lord their God was holy:

Lastly, To give them some intimations and hopes of future favours, and to prepare them for the Gospel.

Thus was the Law partly designed to keep them separated from the Gentiles. They had lands divided to each tribe and family: they could not easily acquire great riches, or waste and destroy all their patrimony; for by the law concerning the Jubilee, estates which had been sold returned every fiftieth year to the first owners, and upon that account must have been bought and sold the cheaper. Usury also
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amongst themselves was forbidden, which made it difficult to borrow large sums; nor could they strictly observe their law, and keep up a considerable trade and intercourse with foreigners. The people of Israel therefore in ancient times lived much to themselves, and their possessions consisted chiefly in lands, herds, and flocks, and they were for the most part ^a husbandmen, cultivating the earth, and subsisting upon its produce. Thus were they placed in a condition which ^b wise and ingenious Writers have celebrated, as the most happy, and the most remote from temptations to vice.

This leads me to observe that the discourses, sayings, and parables, even so late as in the Gospels, are suited to such a people, and abound with allusions to husbandry, and to the objects with which men are most acquainted in a country life. The wicked are compared

^a Josephus *contr. Apion*, i. 12.

^b O fortunatos nimium, bona si sua norint,
Agricolas, quibus ipsa, procul discordibus armis,
Fundit humo facilem victum justissima tellus.

Virgil.

Cupiditates porro quæ possunt esse in eo, qui ruri semper habitavit, et in agro colendo vixerit? quæ vita maxime disjuncta a cupiditate, et cum officio conjuncta.

Cicero, *Orat. pro S. Roscio*, 14.

to trees bringing forth no fruit, to whose root the ax is laid. The Messias is he who hath his fan in his hand, to purge his floor; who will gather the wheat and burn the chaff. The fowls of the air which sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and the lilies and grafs so beautifully clothed are set before men, to excite them to trust in God. The good tree and the corrupt tree are emblems of the righteous and of the wicked. The dispositions of the people to receive the word of God are compared to fields ripe for harvest. The righteous are separated from the ungodly at the day of judgment, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. The slothful and dilatory servant of Christ is likened to a labourer putting his hand to the plough, and looking back. Add to these the parables and discourses of the sower who went forth to sow, of the good seed and the tares, of the grain of mustard seed, of treasure found in a field, of plants which God had not planted, of the lost sheep, of the labourers in the vineyard, of the householder who let out his vineyard to wicked husbandmen, of the rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully, and who wanted bigger barns for his fruits, of the barren fig-tree on which much

care had been bestowed, of a corn of wheat dying, and then bringing forth much fruit, of the true vine, and of its living and dead branches.

The Jews avoided the Gentiles, and accounted them unclean, even those who were profelytes, and worshipers of the one God of Israel, if they were uncircumcised, and kept not the ceremonial law. They shunned all familiar intercourse with them; but perhaps only in Judea, because the Jews who dwelt or travelled in other countries could never have been able to carry on their necessary affairs, unless they conversed somewhat more freely.

Another end of the Law was to set up a form of government differing from all others, in which God himself should be the King, and rule over the people in a most remarkable and wonderful manner. In the days of Moses and Joshua, God manifested his presence among them by a continual series of miracles; and thus he would have dealt with them perpetually, if they had shewed themselves in any degree worthy of it; for he assured them that whilst they observed his laws, they should be prosperous and victorious. Some laws he gave them which were scarcely consistent with worldly

worldly wisdom, to exercise their faith and reliance.

Thus; though horses and chariots were of great service in war, God would not suffer them to make use of such assistance; but he promised that if they obeyed him, they should subdue their enemies. These promises were fulfilled to David, who says in one of the Psalms; Some trust in chariots and in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. Yet was this law partly political. The nature of their country was such that it was not expedient for them to abound in horses and cavalry; and God did not intend that they should make extensive conquests, but sit down contented with their own territories.

Again; Every seventh year they were not to sow their fields, nor prune their vineyards, nor reap the harvest, nor gather in the fruits which would grow of their own accord. This in the common course of things must have been some loss to them, especially in a land where they lived chiefly by husbandry. But this inconvenience God promised to remove: If ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold we shall not sow, nor gather in
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our increase. Then will I command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.

Again, The law says; Three times a year shall all your males appear before the Lord in the place which he shall chuse. By meeting in one place they must have left the country round about them defenceless, exposed to thieves and to their enemies. But here also God promised to guard them. No man, says God, shall desire thy land, when thou shalt appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year.

Hence, by the way, appears the unreasonableness of supposing that Moses was indeed a virtuous and a wise man; but that the Law which he drew up for the Israelites was of his own contrivance, and that he called it a divine revelation, to make the people reverence it, and imposed upon them for their good.

If he was a virtuous man, he would not have done evil that good might come of it; and if he was a wise man, he would never have made such laws as these, and have promised what he was not able to perform.

This law is considered in a Discourse on the Sabbath.

The

The same may be observed of some^d laws, for the breach of which no human punishment was appointed, or could be inflicted; but God declared that he would chastise the offender, and mentioned the particular evil that he would bring upon him.

Moses, and afterwards Joshua by the appointment of Moses, divided the land of Canaan between the tribes; and such was their respect for their Lawgiver, that for many ages no tribe encroached upon the limits of another, which perhaps can be said of no nation besides this. It was a sign that they were fully convinced of the divine original of their laws.

^d If a man lie with his uncle's wife, they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. And if a man shall take his brother's wife, they shall be childless. *Levit. xx. 20, 21.*

Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. *Levit. xvii. 10.*

When the Priest hath made the woman suspected of adultery to drink the water, it shall come to pass, that if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot.—And if the woman be not defiled, then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed. *Numb. v. 27.*

This

This division of the country seemed to be in some respects inconvenient, and in all appearance of little consequence, and beneath the care of the Legislator. But the end and design of it might be to make the tribe and the pedigree of the Messias certain and evident, and to prove the accomplishment of the prophecies concerning him.

Another end for which we may suppose the law to have been given, was, that it might be in some measure a light to enlighten the Gentiles, to spread the knowledge of one God, and so to preserve it, that it might not be quite obliterated by idolatry. The Israelites indeed, as we observed, avoided familiar commerce with the Gentiles; but their Religion admitted proselytes, and proselytes there were to it in all ages, of whom some were circumcised and received the whole law, and were esteemed as Jews; and others, though not circumcised, yet worshiped the one God of Israel, and kept the law of nature, and abstained from blood. It is very probable that the people of Israel, when they were free themselves from idolatry, and not in subjection to any other nation, never suffered any Gentiles to dwell amongst them who were not proselytes; and in the
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time of Solomon, which seems to have been the time when that nation was most flourishing and powerful, there were more than one hundred and fifty thousand ^e strangers, or profelytes, in the land of Israel.

Afterwards the Jews in their dispersions, captivities, and settlements in different places, communicated the knowledge of one God and of morality in the countries where they sojourned; and in the time of our Saviour there were both Jews and profelytes dwelling in all lands. Nor did the translation of the Scriptures into the Greek tongue serve a little to propagate the truths contained in them. That the Gentiles were indebted to the Jews in this respect, might be shewed in some ^f instances, and in the remarkable conformity which there is between several of their laws and the laws of Moses.

I shall now make some remarks on the defects and imperfections of the Law.

Though that part of the Law which was ceremonial served for good and wise purposes, yet considered in itself, and compared with the Gospel, it was a weak and imperfect institu-

^e 2 Chron. ii. 17.

^f Eusebius, H. E. i. 2. et Præp. Evang.

tion,

tion, fitted only for children in knowledge, and also a burdensome and severe ordinance, as the Apostles testify.

How burdensome it was, and how expensive it was, will appear to any one who examines it with attention, and considers the variety of ceremonies to be observed in the strictest manner, which occasioned many, and often great inconveniences, and which probably no Jew ever exactly observed; whence doubts and fears would arise in conscientious minds. Add to this that their Teachers afterwards, by their traditionary doctrines, and their unreasonable comments on the Law, had made it in many instances more troublesome than it was in itself. To these inconveniences our Saviour perhaps hints, though obscurely, when he says, Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden; ye who labour under the bondage of the Law, and are heavy laden with the burdens which your false Teachers have added to it; and I will give you rest.

This representation of the Jewish Religion may be thought to bear hard upon it, and to furnish plausible arguments against it. But

* See this subject fully considered by *Outram*, Sermon VII.

in truth it was neither needless, nor unfit that the people of Israel should have been thus governed and conducted for a certain time. God himself in the first ages of their establishment was their civil Magistrate and their King, and they his subjects. But these subjects were prone to idolatry and rebellion, and surrounded with wicked and idolatrous neighbours; and therefore were bound up by ritual laws in every instance of life and action; so that whatsoever they saw, and whatsoever they did, they were put in mind of the Lord their God, and of his absolute sovereignty: and their bondage under this laborious dispensation was partly designed to make them the more willing to embrace the Gospel, and the easier terms of Christianity.

The nature of the Jewish government, as to taxes and tributes, may be illustrated by a familiar instance, by that of copyhold estates. The whole country of Canaan was the land of God, in a particular sense. He miraculously extirpated the old inhabitants for their wickedness. In their stead he chose the Israelites, poor vagrants, who had not a foot of ground of their own; he gave them a country fruitful and cultivated, full of houses, goods, gardens,

gardens, vineyards, oliveyards, cattle and every necessary accommodation, to which they had no right. Therefore God did not make them freeholders; they held their possessions under him, and to him they were obliged to pay a large yearly rent, for the service of his court, of the tabernacle or temple, for the support of religion and of its ministers, and for the maintenance of the poorer people; and their whole system, as we observed before, seems to have been contrived to keep them in a middle state, so that no one should become very rich, or very necessitous and miserable.

St. Paul hath represented the state of the Jews as a state of infants and slaves. He says that whilst they continued under the Law, they were children, and that their rites and ceremonies were rudiments adapted to the low capacities of children, and designed to train them up and prepare them for the Gospel; he says also that they were slaves, that they had received the spirit of bondage to fear, because they were obliged to the performance of external services which in themselves had no goodness, and compelled to the observance of them chiefly by servile motives, by the fear of punishment.

Though in the Law there were sacrifices and propitiations instituted for several offences, and pardon was promised upon these conditions, yet there were many sins for which God appointed no atonement, and offered no mercy. Death was to be the punishment; and though it was reasonable to hope that repentance might be profitable to the sinner in the future state, yet there was no clear and express revelation made concerning this point.

St. Paul also observes that no Jew had so kept the law, as to be able to conclude that he was in the favour of God; but that he must acknowledge himself a sinner, who, if tried by that law, could not be justified and acquitted.

Because according to the Law, the favour of God was promised on no other terms than an observance of every part of the law, St. Paul calls the Jewish religion, Works; as in opposition to it, he calls the Gospel, Grace; that is, a covenant in which God mercifully accepts our endeavours to be perfect, and our repentance and amendment instead of unfinning obedience.

Because the Law insisted so much upon a bodily service, the same Apostle calls that Religion,

ligion, Flesh; as in opposition to it he calls Christianity, Spirit.

To encourage the Jews to the performance of their duty, the Law proposed rewards to the obedient. But those rewards were a long and happy life in the land which God had given them. Of future happiness they seem rather to have had intimations than full assurances. But those intimations were strong and numerous; and the doctrine of another state, in general, was known and admitted amongst them.

The Law was defective, as in other points, so in this, that it was not a general revelation of God's will to mankind, nor indeed of its own nature fitted for universal use. It seems confined to the people to whom it was delivered, in its promises, in its threats, in its rewards and punishments, in several duties and conditions which it required, in the ceremonies, sacrifices, feasts, and customs which it appointed. It admitted proselytes indeed; but it could not have been the religion of any other nation; and the number of the proselytes, though considerable enough sometimes, when compared with the number of the Israelites, or Jews, yet when compared with the Gentile

world, was so small, that the Psalmist might well say in the text; God hath not so dealt with any nation, neither have the Heathen knowledge of his laws.

And here we may observe that the laws by which the Jews were separated from the Gentiles, and the many peculiar favours which they had received from God, produced through the fault of that people ill effects in them, as a conceited opinion of themselves, with a dislike and contempt of others, which is indeed the usual temper and character of those nations which keep up little intercourse with foreigners.

The Law tolerated polygamy, and divorce upon slight occasions, two practices which though not immoral in their own nature, were attended with bad consequences, produced jealousy and discord, hatred and malice in families, and made it exceeding difficult for children to love their brethren and sisters, and to honour their parents. This, as our Saviour observes, was permitted to the Jews, only to prevent greater mischiefs which would have followed the prohibition. Thus God, when he condescended to be their Legislator and their King, condescended to their imperfections,

tions, and acted as human governors are often obliged to act, who account it wisdom, of two evils to permit the lesser, and to connive at things which they disapprove.

From the defects of the Law, it seems reasonable to suppose that it was not designed to continue always. Therefore God, by the Prophets, added from time to time new revelations to the law, removing some of its obscurity, and allaying some of its severity, as we before observed, and also promised greater discoveries to be made in his appointed time.

Therefore also inspired men, upon certain occasions, neglected and set aside some of the ceremonial laws, to shew that they were not of perpetual obligation, and might perhaps, if God saw it proper, be quite abolished.

Therefore did God intimate in the writings of the Old Testament that he would one day make another covenant, and consequently a better; and that this second covenant should take in more people, might well be presumed from those declarations which had been made of God's love to mankind, that he was good to all, and that his tender mercies were over all his works.

Accordingly, many are the intimations in the prophetic writings, that God would enlighten the world which lay in darkness, and reveal himself to the Gentiles, and that then in every place incense should be offered to his name, and a pure offering.

Thus was the Law a Preceptor to the Jews, as the Apostle speaks, to bring them to Christ, a dispensation appointed in condescension to the weakness of that people, to train them up and fit them by degrees for the reception of the Gospel.

I should now proceed to vindicate the Law of Moses, and the Jewish Religion from some objections which have been raised against them, both in ancient and in modern times. But this shall be reserved for another opportunity.

S E R M O N X.

PSALM cxlvii. 19, 20.

He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments, they have not known them.

IN a former discourse, I offered some remarks on the Law of Moses, on its end and design, its usefulness, and its defects. I now proceed to vindicate that Law and the Jewish Religion from some objections which have been raised against them both in ancient and in modern times.

First; Sacrifices were disliked by some learned and respectable philosophers; and for this and other reasons Judaism appeared to them an injudicious and a superstitious religion.

They observed that the Supreme God, who

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is a pure and holy Being, could not be honoured by bloody victims, that such gross and material presents must needs be odious to him; that none but Demons, that is, an inferior class of Deities, could rejoice in oblations of this kind; that they, being embodied spirits, might perhaps receive pleasure and profit from the steam of incense and of burnt-offerings; but that honourable sentiments and purity of heart were the only oblation proper to be made to the Father of Gods and men, and the only sacrifice and service which could be acceptable in his sight.

Now to do justice to all persons, and to commend what is commendable even in an adversary, we shall not scruple to own that there is something plausible in their objection, and that it cannot be answered and taken off without making some concessions, and allowing that part of it is not absurd and unreasonable.

We must therefore observe that sacrifices were not appointed as the most excellent way of serving God, or even as a practice good in itself, but partly in condescension to the weakness of a stubborn people, partly by way of fine and punishment for their transgressions, partly as emblematic ceremonies shewing the heinous

heinous and dangerous nature of sin which deserved death, and partly as a figurative representation of the atonement to be made by the Lamb of God who should take away the sins of the world.

Though they were required by the Law, yet the Prophets speak of them sometimes in a slighting and disparaging manner, as if God neither ordered nor approved them; which seeming contradiction may be thus removed: First; according to the style of Jewish language, things are forbidden or rejected absolutely which are only meant comparatively with something else. So that when it is said that God desires and approves not sacrifice, but goodness and righteousness, the meaning is that he prefers these to sacrifice.

Secondly, God never commanded sacrifice as a thing of its own nature right and fit, but only as useful or necessary by way of consequence. It was usually a rite by which men renewed a covenant with God, and it supposed some transgression; so that if men had never sinned, it would have had no place.

When God accepted it, he approved it only as it was a testimony of contrition, an humble acknowledgment of unworthiness, a desire to honour

honour him with a present, and to be received again into favour and alliance with him. Hence it was that God rejected and abhorred all oblations where there was no purpose of amendment, no intention to keep his commandments. He would not allow them to be ordinances of his, when thus perverted and abused.

As to those sacrifices and oblations which were not sin-offerings; the presenting a small part of their food and of their property to God, as an acknowledgment that he preserved and maintained them, or the bestowing a part of it to those who ministered in sacred things, this was a practice in which there was nothing absurd; it had a plain tendency to keep up a belief in God, and a national religion, and consequently to improve the manners of men.

Again; the burdensome nature of the Ceremonial Laws is a considerable objection to them. Such in particular were the laws relating to natural, or bodily, or ceremonial uncleanness. The touching of a dead creature, of a leprous person, and of a multitude of things called unclean, was attended with many inconveniences, and required many lustrations and purifications: and hence the moral duties
between

between parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, masters and servants, would be sometimes obstructed, when the letter of the law, and the dictates of humanity and affection were at variance. Several cases might be put, in which the strict observance of the ceremonial rites would be scarcely practicable, and excessively troublesome.

The best solutions that we can offer seem to be these :

First ; Since the Ceremonial law, in general, was expedient and suitable to the situation, capacity, and circumstances of the people, particular inconveniences which were unavoidable are not to be objected to the whole system, which, all things considered, was the best that could be established.

Secondly ; These injunctions, though seemingly absolute, must have admitted some relaxation and connivance in cases of mercy, of necessity, and indeed of inadvertence. They must have been sometimes violated by oversight, or by other occupations, and as we may suppose, were not severely punished, but excusable upon a general repentance: for who could tell how oft he offended, and what faults he might have committed which were secret even from

from himself, and had escaped his knowledge ? It is the voice of nature and reason that no man is held to the observance of impossibilities ; and to observe the whole ceremonial law without any deviation, seems to have been impossible. Yet hence scruples, and doubts, and surmises, and misgivings would arise in conscientious minds ; so that this may be considered as one of the imperfections in the Judaical system.

Thirdly ; These rigid laws were calculated to stir up the care and caution of the people to observe them at least as far as they could, and never to break them boldly and wantonly, but to fear the divine judgments which might fall upon them ; and thus a general reverence to rites and ordinances was secured.

Fourthly ; The burdensome nature of these precepts was intended to excite their regard and obedience to the Prophets, who taught them the superior excellence and importance of the moral Law ; and it prepared them to receive with compliance and gratitude the Gospel of Christ, which treated them with more gentleness, and removed from them a yoke, which, as the Apostles say, neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.

Another

Another objection to the Jewish religion is taken from the bloody wars which the Israelites waged with some nations, and with some cities, by divine command, and in which they were directed to give no quarter to their enemies, but to put them all to the sword.

This objection hath been repeated from time to time, and hath been urged as unanswerable.

But it is strange that any one who believes in God should think this to be an insuperable objection, a difficulty not to be removed, and a full confutation of the Jewish Religion, because such sort of reasoning will overset natural as much as revealed religion. It will prove, if it proves any thing, that God cannot suffer diseases and calamities to destroy so many of his creatures every day; for diseases and calamities are in some sense of his appointment, and arise from the constitution and the nature of the things which he hath created.

As to those cruel wars and massacres, we may observe;

Some actions are so evil, that no change of circumstances can make them lawful: such are breach of trust, wilful perjury, and every iniquity that is committed against conscience.

Other

Other actions there are, which considered in their own nature are evil, but by a change of circumstances become either innocent, or good: such is the taking away the life of a man, which when it is done for self-defence, is harmless; and when it is done by lawful authority, and to punish heinous crimes, is right and good.

To take away the possessions, the health, or the life of an innocent person, innocent as to us, is a crime amongst men, who have no right to act thus; but if God should take them away, there would be no injustice in it, because he hath a right to give such things, and to resume his gifts.

Now though God cannot be supposed to command or to permit a man to be envious, malicious, or unthankful, to bear false witness, and to forswear himself, yet he may command him to take away the life of another man; for God is the Lord of life, and may recall what he gave; and when by his command the innocent are cut off along with the guilty, which was the case in the wars with the Canaanites, God can make them a^a compensation in another

^a I am sensible that they with whom I am now reasoning would reply that I take a future state for granted. It is true: but unless they

their state, and so no injury is done to them. He ordered the Israelites to destroy those wicked nations, in which general calamity the children returned to Him who made them, and who could dispose of them more to their own advantage than if he had suffered them to live out their days in this world, and to follow the example of their incorrigible parents.

It is reasonable to suppose that, as the Scripture says, the iniquities of these devoted nations were arrived to the utmost excess, and that they were as ripe for destruction, and as fit to be blotted out from the face of the earth, as the old World was when it perished by the flood.

God might have destroyed them himself by sudden death; but he made use of the sword of the Israelites; and since it was fit that judgment should be executed upon them, it was expedient that the Jews should be the ministers of God's justice. It was decreed by Providence that the people of Israel should be a distinct nation, separated from all others;

they will allow this, it is to no purpose to dispute with them about points of revealed religion. There is a previous question to be settled with such a person; and the question is; Do you believe in God? *De Jove quid sentis?*

and this way of taking possession of the promised land contributed to keep up the separation : it made them odious and formidable to their neighbours, and prevented in a good measure any intercourse and familiarity with them.

Another objection to the Old Testament is, that Moses and the Prophets had not just notions of the divine perfections; and ascribe to God things unworthy of him. Thus for example, they represent God as punishing the children for the faults of the parents, as being the author of evil, and as obnoxious to human infirmities, and to the passions of grief, anger, and jealousy.

As to God's visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, it is a subject which requires a full and particular discussion : but to contract it into as few words as we possibly can, these short general remarks may suffice for the present.

First, this threatening being annexed to the commandment against idolatry, is not properly personal, but rather national. If the people forsook the Lord, and followed other Gods, he threatned to inflict punishments upon them, the evil effects of which would be felt by the third and fourth generation.

Secondly, God still reserved to himself a power, by a particular providence, to shew favour to particular persons who should distinguish themselves by their good behaviour, and carefully avoid the vices and iniquities of their fore-fathers.

Thirdly, when the nation was degenerated, and was punished for it, and the righteous and the wicked were involved in the same public calamities, God was able to make a compensation to the least guilty and the more innocent, partly in this world, and fully in another world. From the present inequalities of Providence, the Jews might have collected the doctrine of a future state; and if they did not make the inference, it was their own fault, since they had so many full, clear, and express declarations of God's goodness, of his impartiality, and of his love for those who loved him, and kept his commandments.

As to the objection that God is the author of evil, it may be replied:

The Gentiles, who had confused and imperfect notions of the Deity, used to ascribe events to Fate and to Fortune, that is, to mere names, to things which had no existence; and supposed their own Gods, as well as themselves,

to be subject to the imperious dominion of Necessity. The Jews, who had juster notions of the Deity, and acknowledged one God and Ruler of all, and were accustomed to a more religious style, ascribed all things to God, even those actions and those events of which he could not be the immediate author. But by this way of speaking they never meant to remove the guilt of wicked actions from men, and to lay it upon God; they only intended to acknowledge the superintending providence of God, and to declare that no event took place without his knowledge and permission. In this sense they held that he created both good and evil, and that there were not two Gods, two Principles, or First Causes, but only one Author of all, of all those powers and qualities which the righteous employ to good purposes, and of which sinners make a bad use.

As to those passages of Scripture in which God is clothed with human infirmities, and subject to human passions, the old and the common answer is the proper one, that these things are spoken in condescension to our capacities, and arise from the imperfection of human language, and the necessity of representing things spiritual in a way suitable to
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our conceptions. That this is a true solution appears from those many places of Scripture in which God is represented as a Being endued with all perfections, and infinitely removed from all defects; and it is observable that though human passions are thus ascribed to him, yet human faults never are. When our affections or passions are applied to him, we are not to understand such expressions according to the letter, but in a figurative sense. In him grief, and anger, and repentance of past favours, are an high dislike of sin; and jealousy is a strong disapprobation of disobedience, and particularly of idolatry, which is elegantly described under the idea of adultery, by which the soul leaves her God, and yields herself to the impure love of a mean object.

Another, and a common objection to the Old Testament, is taken from the behaviour of those illustrious persons who are represented as holy men and servants of God, and some of whose actions are not condemned in Scripture, and yet are not justifiable.

This objection seems to have received too much strength from some injudicious answers which have been made to it; for these answerers have laid it down as a rule, that when

the Scriptures mention the actions of good men, without either approving or blaming them, those actions must be supposed to be innocent or commendable, and must be defended by us as such. But whosoever shall undertake to justify all actions of this kind, will soon find that he hath undertaken too hard a task, and will expose not only himself, which is a matter of small consequence, but his cause and his religion to the scorn of Doubters and Unbelievers.

Therefore we may presume to lay down another rule, as far more reasonable, which is this : When the Scriptures mention the actions of a good man in an historical way, without approbation or censure, we are to judge of them according to the rules of reason, of morality, and of good sense, and condemn them if they deserve it. This a just and safe rule of judging, if we use it with these cautions and restrictions. First, we must remember that the doctrines of morality in those antient times were not so perfect as those of the Gospel ; and therefore proper allowances must be made upon that account. Secondly, the history of the Old Testament is often very short and concise ; and as we know not all the circumstances, we should

should rather incline to judge too favourably than too severely of the actions of good men which are of an ambiguous nature, and to admit of any candid apology which may be suggested for them; at least, we should suspend our judgment in such cases, and not decide too hastily.

Moses, as an historian, hath related the manner in which Jacob supplanted Esau, without either approving or condemning it. It is left to us to examine it by the rules of reason, truth, justice, and equity: and upon thus considering it, we must be inclined to determine against it, and to think that it is not altogether justifiable.

God had decreed that of the two sons of Isaac, the younger should be the father of a superior and chosen race, of God's own people, and that the elder should be deprived of this privilege, and be the father of an inferior or less favoured nation. This had been revealed to Isaac and to his wife Rebecca; and probably it was no secret to the two sons. Esau had one day, in a careless and irreligious mood, sold his birthright to Jacob, who on the other hand should not have bought it, and have taken this

unfriendly advantage of his brother's indifcretion.

The last blessing of an holy man and of a prophet was accounted prophetic; and Jacob and his mother were perhaps afraid that Isaac, by solemnly blessing Esau as his first-born, would reverse God's decree; and therefore they contrived to deceive him by an imposture, and to make him believe that Jacob was Esau. They should rather have left it to God to bring about the decrees of his providence in such a manner as he judged it expedient.

If this was a fault, as it seems to have been, Jacob, as it appears from sacred history, suffered for it. His acquisition of the birthright was of no personal advantage to him; as the loss of it was no personal detriment to his brother, who seems to have had the greater share of power and temporal prosperity. Jacob was forced to fly from his father's house; he was ill used by his uncle Laban for many years, and he underwent great terrors when he met his brother Esau, and dreaded the effects of his resentment.

Another objection to the Old Testament ariseth from a few strange, preternatural, miraculous accounts, which have appeared, according

according to some interpretations of them, improbable even to persons who firmly believed the Scriptures. They have appeared improbable, not because they were miraculous, (for it is allowed that God can do every thing that is not a contradiction) but because the occasion for which they were done, or the circumstances attending them, or the nature of the thing itself, or the consequences of it, gave reason to doubt that the expressions were not rightly understood.

Such difficulties have exercised the expounders of the Sacred Books, and they have produced two ways of interpreting. The one hath been to take that sense which was least marvellous: the other hath been to ^b increase

^b In Joshua x, it is said that the sun and the moon stood still. Father Calmet takes this according to the letter, and defends it thus;

“ The sun and moon stood still at the same time, and the whole machine of the world was at rest; like all the parts of a concert of music in a profound silence.” Is not this admirable! See Grotius and Le Clerc on the place, two Commentators who had more learning and judgment than two hundred Calmets.

In the same chapter it is said that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven, &c.

Most Interpreters suppose these to have been hail-stones of an extraordinary size, which falling with great violence slew many of the Canaanites. But Calmet will have them to have been real stones.

the wonderful circumstances, and resolve all into the power of God.

For example; Moses giving the people a summary account how God had protected and guided and fed them in the wilderness, says, without any particular introduction, or stress, or emphasis, or solemnity; Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell these forty years.

Some interpreters, and particularly the Jewish Rabbins, understand by these words, that the raiment of the Israelites during their abode in the wilderness for forty years, never decayed by using, and never was torn by accident; and that the very clothes, which they had when they were children, grew like their skin along with their bodies, and fitted them when they were men.

Others explain it thus; The good providence of God took care that the Israelites in the wilderness never wanted raiment. They were supplied partly by the flocks and the materials which they brought out of Ægypt, and partly by the Arabs, Ishmaelites, and neighbouring people; so that they had change of apparel when they stood in need of it, and were

were not obliged to go barefoot, ragged and half-naked for want of clothes. God so ordered the course of things, that they obtained whatsoever was absolutely needful, by natural means, or if they failed, by a miraculous interposition.

In general, in the interpretation of the holy Scriptures, the rules of sober criticism, of right reason, and of good sense; the sacred and immoveable principles of natural religion, and the dictates of justice, and equity must be consulted, and by them we must be determined.

It is a very bad habit which some persons have contracted, to rail at human reason, as delusive and imperfect. They might as well rail at their own eyes, because they will not shew them what passeth in the planets. When God reveals and commands any thing, it is our duty to believe it and to do it, upon his authority; but whether God hath revealed or hath commanded such and such things, these are questions which must be tried and decided by Reason: and if Reason be discarded, Faith is no longer Faith, but Fanaticism and Frenzy.

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To extoll Reason in such a manner as to make Revelation superfluous, is as great an error on the other hand. Let us be very careful to shun both the extremes.

S E R M O N XI.

MATTH. xi. 30.

My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

IT would be a most convenient thing for the children of men if pleasure and duty could always go together; for as they have a strong inclination to pleasure, they must needs perform their duty very coldly and superficially, if they take no pleasure in it. And yet in the present state of imperfection, the opinion and the taste of many persons is so depraved, that pleasure seems to them not at all consistent with duty, nor duty with pleasure. Hence it comes to pass that from this struggle between obligation and inclination, they become guilty and unhappy at the same time. Their reason tells them that duty must be performed, their heart inclines them to irregular pleasure, and this

this very pleasure is embittered by reproofs of reason, and remorse of conscience.

Our Saviour, in the text, proposeth to rectify these errors, and remove these evils, and like a wife and a kind Master, invites us to come to him, and to be cured of our false taste and our prejudices, and delivered from an uneasy and self-condemned condition. Come to me, and take upon you my yoke and my burden.

Since it hath been observed of our Saviour's discourses, that they were often suggested by the objects which offered themselves to his view, a conjecture hath been proposed, which is not improbable, that when he spake the words of the text, he was looking upon the concourse of travellers who were coming up to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the great festivals, some of them loaded with burdens, and all of them fatigued with their journey; and that he thence took occasion to speak of things spiritual, of the easy yoke of religion, and of the true rest of the soul.

The things which he requires he represents as being really a yoke and a burden, that is to say, as matters of duty and obligation, with which we must needs comply; but at the same time,

time, he assures us that we shall find that yoke to be easy, and that burden to be light.

The text is clear; the expressions indeed are figurative, yet so familiar and obvious, that they want no interpretation. They offer to our consideration the following truths:

I. That with respect to the perverse inclinations of men, the religion of Christ may justly be called a yoke and a burden:

II. That if this religion be considered in itself, it is an easy yoke, and a light burden:

III. That it is easy and light, if it be compared with the yoke and the burden which men often lay upon themselves and upon others:

IV. Lastly, That the encouragements and the assistances in the Gospel are sufficient to remove all the difficulties of which men complain in the practice of their duty.

* I. We may observe that, with respect to the perverse inclinations of men, the religion of Christ may justly be called a yoke and a burden.

The yoke and burden of Christ is his religion, and more particularly that part of it

* Some of the following remarks are taken from a Sermon of *L'Enfant*.

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which relates to practice; concerning which St. John says that his commandments are not grievous. The assertion seems hard to be reconciled with experience, and with the inclinations and behaviour of many, who account the precepts of the Gospel to be extremely rigid and difficult. And indeed so they are, in one point of view, in one sense, and with respect to human corruptions. Morality is the hardest part of Christianity. There are doctrines relating to faith; and faith, which is the belief of things not seen, requires an inquisitive, sober, and religious temper, together with a docility and submission of mind. But yet amongst us, absolute unbelief is not the predominant defect. On the contrary, many are indolent and lazy in points relating to faith; and thinking it less fatiguing to assent than to examine, they believe, or fancy that they believe, without much reflection. Whether such a faith as this can be excusable, or suitable to the nature of a reasonable creature, I shall not at present inquire. I speak only of matter of fact, and I say that in the Christian world the easier task is to believe, and the harder is to practise. And thus, to the shame and disgrace of men, the religion of Christ is only a troublesome

some yoke, because virtue and goodness is so. A person who hath given a loose to his irregular passions, thinks it difficult to shake off ambition, covetousness, rapaciousness, revenge, and worldly pleasures, and to live soberly, righteously, and piously. This is the yoke and the burden. Consult any man upon the subject of Religion; set before him on the one hand the Ceremonial Law of the Jews, and on the other hand the Ten Commandments, or the moral Law, and ask him which of these two is the most difficult. If he be unprejudiced, and hath not had his taste spoiled, and his understanding vitiated, he will reply that the Ceremonial Law is a slavish imposition, and that the Moral Law is plain, amiable, reasonable, and so well fitted to human nature, that men ought to have observed it, though God had never required it. Thus he will answer; and yet the Jews, for some ages, observed tolerably well their Sabbaths, their fasts, their peculiar diet, their purifications, their sacrifices, and all their tedious ritual, whilst their own Prophets and their own Historians record and censure and lament their depraved manners. Whence came this? I have already told you, because in Religion every thing is

easier to a corrupted mind than the practice of virtue. Superstition steps in to the aid of Immorality, and gives a sinner the flattering hopes that by a rigid observation of externals he may compound with God for the neglect of goodness.

It is remarkable that there is always more zeal and submission to be found in those who are devoted to a false or a fanatical religion, than in those who profess a true and a reasonable one. This may seem strange, but it is quite natural. In false or depraved religions, almost the whole system consists in unintelligible doctrines, in ceremony, outside shew, and bodily devotion; and this is easier than improvement of mind, and amendment of manners. It is easier to go a pilgrimage, or to stroll about the world, than to renounce one bad habit; it is easier for a man to whip himself than to mend himself, and to tell his beads than to quit his vices; it is easier to talk or to hear others talk all day about Christ and about faith and grace, than to forgive injuries and to be chaste and pure in heart.

Observe those religions which are made up of superstition and ceremony, such as the Pagan religion was, and such as the Christian religion is,

is, where it is greatly corrupted. Consider what a spirit there is in it, what a passion for trifling ceremonies, what pious lies and frauds, what zeal to make profelytes, and to slander, plague, and punish all who are called heretics, what attachment to false teachers, and what blind veneration for blind guides. What is the reason of all this? It is, that these things may be practised without amendment, without renouncing inordinate affections, and indeed without one grain of common honesty. Hence I conclude that if Christianity be a yoke and a burden, as indeed it is to many people, it is to the shame of those who think it and who find it to be so, since all its difficulties arise from our misconduct, and not from its own nature: which leads me to shew,

II. That Christianity, in itself, is an easy yoke and a light burden.

Natural Religion, before our Saviour came, was miserably defaced, almost sunk in oblivion, in a weak and languishing state, without spirit, without strength, without efficacy. God sends his son to quicken and revive it, and to recommend it to the world. To engage men to the practice of it, our Lord employs the strongest of all motives, the promise of im-

mortality, and the fear of losing this blessed reward, and of exchanging it for incurable misery. The Christian Religion is a Religion of morality, and that part of it which relates to faith was revealed for no other end than to persuade us and assist us to keep the moral Law, and to account it an easy yoke and a light burden.

The Jewish Revelation was a renovation of natural Religion, in the Law of the two Tables which God gave from mount Sinai. But Moses, by divine appointment, instituted also many rites and ceremonies, not so much for the improvement of morality, as by way of guard and curb, to keep in order a stubborn generation, attached to sensible objects, who would have gone after the idols and the forgeries of their neighbours, if they had been treated like philosophers, and suddenly reduced to a simple and spiritual religion. Even these restraints often proved insufficient; and this gross and carnal people, who had imbibed in the land of Ægypt a tincture of every vice and of every superstition, soon turned religion into a mere ceremonial, and left the religion of the heart. From this condition our Saviour proposed to release them, to improve their minds, and to enlarge their views. His religion re-
stores

stores man to himself, and its reasonableness will appear to every one who will converse with his own heart, consult his own conscience, and listen to the inward dictates of truth and equity.

When it is said that Christianity is a republication, a renovation and an improvement of the Natural Law, this must not be understood of its doctrines of redemption by Jesus Christ, of a resurrection to eternal life, of the assistance of the holy Spirit, and of such points of Christian Divinity as are not discoverable without a revelation; but of its rules of behaviour, and of its moral precepts.

Let us consider a little some of those precepts which seem to be harsh and irksome.

The forgiveness of injuries is a Christian duty; and I say it is also a natural duty. Christianity prescribes nothing upon this subject, but what the human understanding knows and feels to be right. It knows that there is a God, the governor and the judge of all, and that it is therefore fit to leave him to be the avenger of injuries, or to leave it to those who by his providence are appointed to be his ministers, and the public dispensers of justice. The light of nature goes yet farther than this.

It teacheth us that there is more greatness of mind in forgiving than in revenging injuries, that the latter is an effect of weakness, the former of courage.

Self-denial is another Christian duty, and is only thought a rigid law by those who, judging from the mere sound of the word, contend against a phantom of their own forming. Let us set the word aside, and examine the thing. To deny one's self is only to deny and renounce one's vices; and natural religion requires this. To deny one's self, is to return home to one's self; it is to quit that self which is foolish, stubborn, and unruly, and to become a reasonable self. It is to cease from being what we are, and to become what we ought to be, and what we wish the world would think us to be. From all these considerations we conclude that Christianity is of its own nature a very easy yoke, and a very light burden, and carries in it the character of its wise, mild, and beneficent Author. For, to review the point in hand, it is not an unreasonable demand to ask of men such things as their own conscience owns to be just, to expect that reasonable creatures should listen to the voice of reason,

reason, to desire of them that they would not be their own enemies, that they would love themselves better than they commonly do, and exchange a pernicious self-love, which fills their lives with bitterness and trouble and remorse into a profitable and prudent self-affection which makes this life smooth and easy, and is a guide to life eternal. It is not unreasonable to do that for the sake of God which they would be obliged to do for their own interest. Let them consider what constraint, what pains, what dissimulation, and what artifice some persons will go through to appear to the world honest, and regular, clear from covetousness, selfishness, pride and debauchery. Christianity only requires that they would take the same care to be really free from vicious habits. And all things duly weighed, it is perhaps the easier task of the two to abstain from iniquity, than to practise it, and yet to dissemble and hide it.

III. I proceed to the third observation, that the religion of Christ is easy and light, if it be compared with the yoke and the burden which men often lay upon themselves and upon others.

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Let us suppose the yoke of Christ to be as uneasy as it appears to a corrupted heart, and let us compare other yokes with it, and see which weighs most, and presses hardest. If a man could live in a state of absolute independency, I should not wonder to see him chuse such a state: but since this is a mere impossibility, and a man by nature is dependent, and must be subject to laws, those of Jesus Christ are the easiest of all. I need not say much of the Jewish yoke. It was very irksome upon two accounts. The number, and the minuteness, and the constraint of their ceremonies was such, that as the Apostles testify, neither they nor their fathers were able to bear them. But that was not all; they seemed to have little or nothing intrinsic to recommend them. It is disagreeable to rational creatures to obey laws for which no other reason appears than the will of the Lawgiver. The Christian institution is not such; it recommends itself to our understanding by its native beauty and inherent excellence.

Where true religion is grossly corrupted, or where false religions prevail, there the yoke imposed upon men is really intolerable. Such
were

were the heavy burdens which, as our Saviour observes, the Scribes and Pharisees laid upon the people, though they had more wit than to lay them upon themselves. False and fanatical Teachers, follow their example, and act the same part; of which we have seen instances enough in our own days. There are few things which would seem more grievous to me than to obey an ignorant and a bold Teacher, who either without condescending to reason with me, or reasoning, as he would call it, in such a way as I could not understand, should command me to believe this, and to do that, under pain of eternal perdition. If I represent to others what they ought to believe and to do, I must endeavour at the same time to prove what I assert; and if I can thus convince and satisfy them, it is not to me, it is to Reason and to Truth that they pay obedience.

But there is another yoke, the most grievous of any, and that is the yoke of sin, the yoke which every one takes upon him, who is a slave to his own vices. It is not possible to imagine any condition more miserable than that of him who persists in wicked courses, committing crimes which his own conscience condemns, and neglecting duties which his own reason approves

proves and honours. He pretends to liberty and independency, and at the same time is a most abject slave. His pleasures depend in a great measure upon things which often he cannot obtain, or which if he hath obtained he cannot secure. His mind is in a continual disorder, his behaviour is mutable and inconsistent, he is forced to act an unnatural part by pretending to be what he is not. He is plagued with remorse for what is past, and with fears of futurity, and can enjoy no rest, but by flying from himself and from his uneasy thoughts. The wise and good Christian is the person who can be truly and properly said to enjoy rational liberty, and a composed mind, and a well-grounded hope, and is subject only to him, whose service is perfect freedom.

IV. But, lastly, as Christianity is equitable in itself, so is it entitled to favours and assistances sufficient to soften all that may seem irksome in its strictest precepts.

The Christian hath, in the first place, the approbation of his Lord and Master, who observes his conduct, and will reward his obedience. He hath also the approbation of men, who generally commend what is right and decent. The world's good word is of some value,
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and he who despises it is a fool. But two reasons should keep us from over-rating it, and being proud of it. The first is, that the greater part are cold friends to virtue, and therefore careless observers and small encouragers of it: the other is, that they who have a real regard for goodness yet sometimes are not able to distinguish it from the appearances and professions of it; and so, if they be of a suspicious temper, they will be backward to applaud those who may really deserve it; and if they be easy and credulous, they will be apt on the other hand to esteem and prefer those who do not deserve it, and to be dupes to boasters and deceivers.

But a good Christian acts his part in a great theatre; he hath the holy Angels, and the holy Spirit, and Christ the judge, and God the Father of all for his spectators; he hath those to overlook him who love goodness above all things, and discern that which is solid and true from that which is false and counterfeit.

This is the great advantage of true religion, namely the approbation of God. It belonged to the Jewish, as to the Christian dispensation; it belongs to every one who doth his duty, whether he be under the Law of Nature or the
Law

Law of Revelation. In the Jewish dispensation, they who were eminent in goodness were often eminently distinguished and recompensed even in this life. And though under the Gospel the same extraordinary and visible interpositions are not continued, yet God is the same, takes the same notice of the obedience of his faithful servants, and will reward them openly at the great day of retribution.

Besides this encouragement, there are other assistances attending the performance of our duty. Our Lord hath expressly said, To him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; which is a promise to every honest and industrious servant that God will concur with his endeavours, smoothing the way for him, and removing obstacles, and inspiring him with wisdom, knowledge, resolution and joy. In the infancy of the Church, the holy Spirit acted with a glorious manifestation of miraculous gifts and graces, and various sensible effects of divine power and goodness. But as the infirmities and the necessities of Christians will continue through all ages, the Divine assistance extends in like manner, and perseveres to act in a way not less efficacious to religious purposes, though it be imperceptibly
and

silently. It is therefore an encouragement to every faithful servant of Christ, that his Master will not leave him to his own weakness, but will make every duty smooth and easy to a well-disposed mind.

The nature of Christian truths is such that every one who duly meditates upon them will find sufficient incitement to his duty. The better we know God, the more we are disposed to love and obey him. The contemplation of the universe, considered as the work of God, discovers such perfections in the Author of all good, that the mind is filled with admiration, gratitude, serious pleasure, and a religious awe and reverence, which are no small part of the worship of God. St. Paul therefore condemned the Pagans, as strangely corrupted, since having first known God even by the works of nature, they did not proceed one step farther, and glorify him as God. The choice which God made of the posterity of Abraham to reveal his will to them, the visible protection which he afforded them, and the multitude of miracles which he wrought on that account, these were so many ties to secure their obedience, and not producing that effect, they stand in sacred history an eternal monument

ment of divine grace and human ingratitude. But still superior are the favours conferred by the Gospel, by the work of redemption. Under the Law, God is a God who hideth himself, and Moses only saw the hinder parts of his glory. That God should chuse one people from all nations, this was an high favour to those whom he thus adopted. But in such a dispensation there is something that disappoints our expectation, and falls short of the notions which Nature and Reason give us of our common Father; and accordingly this was only a temporary covenant which in due time should give place to a better. That Providence which extends itself to a flower of the field, to a bird in the air, to a worm upon the ground, which pervades and animates and supports all nature, promiseth sublimer things than favours confined to one nation and to a small corner of the earth. Therefore God sends his Son, a light to lighten the world that lay in darkness and in the shadow of death. The end and design of the Gospel to those who embrace it is amendment and sanctification, and the truths contained in the Gospel are the best motives to the practice of goodness. The harmony and connection between Christian faith and Chris-

tian morality, and the encouragements to obedience concur to make our duty so reasonable and practicable, that Christians only in name and not in reality are deprived of all excuse.

What stronger motive can be conceived to well-doing than immortal happiness? and what would not a wise man give or endure to secure it? If the hope of an uncertain gain encourages the merchant to undertake long and dangerous voyages; if the desire of rising to high stations will teach the proud and ambitious to submit to a thousand meannesses and inconveniences; if the flattering pleasure of a criminal passion will induce the sensual to sacrifice every thing that ought to be dear to him; how much more should the prospect of endless happiness reconcile us to our reasonable service and duty? After this, let the Irreligious go their ways, and follow their devices, and at last accuse themselves as much as they will of folly and madness; for the accusation is just; but let them not accuse the amiable Gospel of Christ, and add to all their other faults that of reproaching and flandering so kind an institution, and of calling it a yoke which is not easy, and a burden which is not light.

S E R M O N XII.

MATTH. xi. 30.

My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

I HAVE already examined this text, and shewed that the religion of Christ, though it be, in some sense, a yoke and a burden, yet is an easy one, compared with other burdens which men submit to bear, and is recommended by sufficient encouragements and assistances. I shall now resume the subject, chiefly with a view to remove some objections to which it seems liable, and some injudicious and dangerous representations which have been made of it.

Come unto me, says our Saviour to the Jews, ye that labour under the bondage of the Law, and are heavy laden with the burdens of Phari-

saical impositions, and I will deliver you from this oppression. From me ye shall receive what ye are seeking, rest and peace to your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Observe that the Law of Moses was commonly called the Yoke by the Jewish teachers: and in reality it was a yoke, and an heavy one too. St. Paul styles the Law, that is, the Ceremonial Law, a yoke of bondage; and St. Peter calls it a yoke which neither they, nor their fathers were able to bear.

And yet, all the minute, intricate, and troublesome formalities of this Law, though exactly accomplished, could not make the observers perfect, as to conscience, or take away the guilt of sin, of transgressions of the moral Law, and so could not give that rest and peace to the soul, which Christ offered to those who would come to him.

^a Many are the sorrows and troubles to which man is exposed in his pilgrimage through this world: but there is no kind of grief that fits so heavy upon the mind as that which ariseth from the guilt of sin, and the fear of punish-

^a Some of the following remarks are taken from a Sermon of Clagett.

ment. Nothing therefore can be so welcome and grateful to all who are in this situation as an offer such as is here made to us by our Saviour.

There are indeed too many offenders so infatuated and so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, that they feel none of this anxiety, and are as cheerful and well-pleased, as if they were in perfect security. But they who are conscious of their past faults, and apprehensive of God's displeasure, and desirous of regaining his favour, these are disposed to hear the call of Christ, and to try whether he will perform his gracious promises, and give them relief.

It is the peculiar excellence of the Gospel, that it alone can pacify the conscience, and give ease to a mind that labours under the weighty care of reconciling itself to God. The Gospel offers a relief which is not only grateful for the present, but stable and permanent. For when our Lord promiseth that under his direction we shall find rest to our souls, he undoubtedly means a comfort and a repose so well grounded, that we may safely rely upon it, and so constant, that it shall not fail and disappoint

us at the last, and when we stand most in need of it.

It is also complete and unconfined; for he hath promised us no less than the forgiveness of all our sins, and an assurance of God's favour and protection, and of eternal life. He hath told us that he hath suffered for our sakes, and that God for his sake, will pardon and receive us. The commission which he gave to his Apostles, and the authority which he delivered to his Church, is also a ministry of pardon and reconciliation; and his word must needs be secure, because by unquestionable evidence he proved himself to be the Son of God, and the Redeemer of men, to whom all power was given in heaven and on earth.

Something indeed is required on our part; but it seems to be easy and practicable. Come unto me, says he. Whatsoever is meant by this condition, it is expressed in such gentle words, that we have no cause to be dismayed at it, and to stand aloof. To come to Christ is to acknowledge him, to believe in him, to be persuaded in particular of the truth of his promises; and these surely are no hard terms, since we have all possible inducements to trust in him, and none to reject him.

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Thus far all goes on smoothly, and just as we could wish, and men would be glad to sit down and rest here, and accept of these advantageous offers upon such gentle conditions, and travel on no farther in search of salvation; and say to their soul, Soul, thou hast found a quiet situation, take thine ease, and enjoy it.

But when we look into the doctrine of this Saviour, there we find precepts as well as promises, and so great a stress laid by him upon the observation of these precepts, that if we fail of performing them, we are just where we began; our sins remain, and along with them the wrath of God remaineth upon us. If this be the case, then Coming to Christ signifies more than bare believing; it signifies doing his will.

And here two formidable difficulties arise, which seem to take away all the comfort and repose promised to us in the text; and they are, first, the strictness of the duties required from us; and, secondly, the penalty on disobeying these Precepts.

The rule prescribed to us is perfect, it requires all righteousness, insomuch that Christianity is represented as a new birth, by which men become quite different creatures from what

they were before, and from what they would have been under any other dispensation, and under any other situation.

Here then querulous Nature stands forth, pleads her cause, and pours out her complaints. The Gospel, says Nature, lays a severe restraint on those appetites and inclinations which cannot be suppressed without pain and self-denial, which Christ himself hath described by the image of pulling out an eye, and cutting off a limb. These are harsh operations indeed.

The Gospel is austere; it hath no condescension; it makes no allowances for current notions, and the ways of the world. For what says the world? It says, that if you put up one injury, you invite another, and you pass for a coward; if you forego a considerable advantage on a religious account, you will be deemed a scrupulous fool; if you resolve to be strictly honest, you stand a fair chance to live and die a beggar. But the Gospel regards not these prejudices, and this common practice. It gives a short and peremptory answer; Be not conformed to this world.

Numerous are the temptations to lust, covetousness, fraud, extortion, envy, anger, ambition, idleness, gaming, luxury, foolish and expensive

expensive diversions, to which a Christian must not consent, howsoever importunate they may be, and whatsoever apologies they may make for themselves. They are bold petitioners, who will take no refusal, and will renew their assaults from day to day. So that perpetual circumspection and settled resolution is requisite to repel them. And what rest can there be for the soul, who hath so many adversaries to contend with? what peace, nay, what truce in the midst of such a war?

The Gospel prescribes rules not only to the actions, but even to the thoughts, purposes, and desires. And if it be hard to forbear from evil doings, it is still harder to restrain the inclinations.

Nature abhors sufferings; and yet, if needs be, a Christian must be willing to resign up all, and to endure all for righteousness sake. So that to enter with body and mind into the service of Christ, is to enter into a state of hostility with the world and with one's self, instead of sitting down in a state of rest and peace.

This is enough to shew the sublime strictness of the rule. But that which makes it still more grievous is the second cause of com-

plaint, namely, the penalty upon disobedience. If the death of a sinner were the fine which he must pay for his offences, and the grave a state of darkness and oblivion, a shelter and a sanctuary from the divine displeasure, to die would in one sense be a punishment, considered as a loss of our being; but it would also be a release, and a discharge in full for all past accounts. But there is a penalty beyond the grave, and there is no less than an exclusion from the kingdom of heaven; and a severer sentence at the day of judgment will be passed on wicked Christians, than on those who never heard of the Gospel.

Where then is the truth of this promise of rest and peace to those who will come to Christ? a promise so gracious in appearance, and yet clogged with so many incumbrances? and how is this rest to be found in the midst of anxiety and trouble? why, in truth, nothing hath more employed the wits of men in the Christian world, than to find out expedients to reconcile these things, and to make the way of salvation more accessible than it seems to be. Every teacher who undertakes to do this, may expect a favourable attention from all those who conscious of their faults, and desirous of rest and
peace

peace of mind, will lend an ear to an instructor who brings them such glad tidings. Our wishes side with him, and this, we know, goes a great way towards producing an assent. Let us therefore by all means hear what they have to propound.

Some of them tell us, that Christ himself hath fulfilled all righteousness in our stead, and that upon our faith his righteousness is imputed to us for justification. This indeed is a very comfortable doctrine; for if it be true, the Gospel, as far as I can see, releaseth us, not only from guilt, and from punishment, but from duty also. But here must be some mistake; for our Lord, though he tells us that he died in our stead, or for our benefit, yet imposes upon us the keeping his commandments, as a condition to obtain that redemption; and therefore he certainly did not perform those commandments in our stead. We are perpetually exhorted to set him before us, and to walk as he walked; and why should his example be thus recommended to our imitation, if we are discharged from following it? The merit of Christ therefore will not save us the labour of obedience. So these very teachers, if they are not quite frantic, are forced at last to

to come round to us, and to confess one plain truth, that a Christian must keep Christ's commandments. But, say they, it is impossible for a man to do any thing towards his own salvation : regeneration must be wrought in him by an all-powerful operation of the holy Spirit. Why this is also an easy way of becoming righteous, since it is impossible under such an influence to fail of being so. But then, on the other hand, what comfort, I pray, is it to sinners to tell them that if they are fore-appointed to salvation, an irresistible grace will seize upon them by and by ; and if that grace comes not, they shall be lost for ever. If you intend to administer comfort to me, tell me how I may obtain this grace, or you tell me nothing that is worth the hearing.

After all, To talk of compelling a man to be good, is a contradiction in terms ; for where there is force, there is no choice ; and where there is no choice, there is no righteousness ; for righteousness is an act of the will. If a man were irresistibly compelled to do that which in its own nature is good, yet he would not be capable of obedience, or virtue, or any thing else belonging to the perfection and the happiness of a rational creature.

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St. Paul says, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do. That is, according to these interpreters, Work out your own salvation; for you cannot work at all. What an argument do they put into the mouth of the Apostle? Let them take it back for themselves, for it is fit for no one else. The meaning is plainly this; Work out your own salvation; for God hath supplied you and will supply you with every necessary assistance for the accomplishing this work.

But whilst the Gospel treats us as free agents, and exhorts us to be zealous and abounding in good works, it reminds us also not to trust to our works, but to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable, weak, and imperfect creatures, who continually stand in need of assistance and of forgiveness. So many are our omissions, and so many our commissions, that we must not hope for salvation from our own merits, but from the divine mercy.

Since then there is no such thing as being actually religious, either by a compulsion destroying human liberty, or by the obedience of one person transferred over to another; since it is impossible to be at the same time wicked
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by practice, and righteous by proxy, the above-mentioned method of obtaining rest of mind, and peace, and security, is fallacious and absurd.

Shall we bestow a few minutes upon another set of teachers, who have taken some strides beyond the former, and offer us a still more simple and expeditious way to salvation?

They tell us that God sees no faults in his Elect, that Believers, persons regenerate, and in the covenant of grace, cannot sin, though they commit those actions which in the unregenerate and the ungodly would be sins. They are above the obligations of morality; they are spiritual; and so the Spirit sanctifies the man and his actions, of whatsoever kind they be.

This is opening the flood-gates of sin; but in the mean time it is well for civil society that courts of judicature are not regulated by these principles; and if one of these saints should there be found a transgressor of the laws, though he should plead that he is not under the Law, but under grace, his plea will not be allowed; and if he comes off, it must be by the benefit of lunacy.

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Let us turn to another sort of teachers, and hear another expedient.

These men tell us that we may obtain peace and pardon by works of penance, as they are called. When a man hath sinned, say they, he must undergo a punishment suitable to the offence. He must discipline, and scourge, and famish, and torment himself; and this, together with confession, and with absolution from the Priest, will set him right.

Now thus much must be allowed, that both Reason and Religion recommend mortification and self-denial: but this mortification and self-denial is properly and principally a restraint laid upon the mind, upon the irregular passions and evil inclinations of the heart; and a careful shunning the allurements of all sinful temptations. As far as the body is concerned, that must be regulated by the laws of sobriety, chastity, temperance, and abstinence, always from vitious pleasures, and on some occasions from those which in themselves are lawful, that so it may be held in due subjection to the spirit. But such uncommanded austerities as hurt the health and strength of the body, and such practices as are merely external, fall under the denomination of will-worship and superstition;

stition ; and superstition can never compensate for the omission of known duties, and the commission of known sins. And thus we are driven back again to the point which we wanted to shun, namely, that a renewed obedience and the keeping God's commandments are requisite, in order to obtain pardon and peace.

As to absolution, the Church and her Ministers can do no more than to declare and promise the pardon and the favour of God to the penitent ; but they must assure themselves of the sincerity of their repentance, and prove it, if they have opportunity, by their following behaviour. It cannot be supposed that men can forgive sins more effectually than God forgives them ; and his pardon, during this life, is always conditional.

To conclude this inquiry ; If we leave the plain path of obedience, we may try various by-ways ; but Truth, Truth which will not be mocked or corrupted, sends us back again to our Saviour's express rule ; If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. This is the flaming sword of God, which turneth every way, to guard the way of life against all unrighteous and presumptuous persons.

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To those who will tread this path of obedience our Saviour as expressly promiseth peace and rest to their souls, an easy yoke, and a light burden. Let us see then whether we can find this long-sought blessing here; let us consider whether the exactness of the rule, and the necessity of complying with it, makes the Christian discipline too sublime and too severe for human nature, or whether the grace of God doth not mitigate the asperity of these laws, without annulling or destroying any of them.

1. These mitigations and alleviations will appear, if we consider first that the Gospel mercifully leaves room for repentance of sins, at whatsoever time of life they have been committed. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and true to forgive us our sins. If we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.

If after a Christian had offended, there were no hopes of pardon upon repentance and a renewed obedience, it would be a dreadful thing to live under such a law, and such a penalty; and one prevalent temptation in an unguarded hour would ruin a man for ever. But blessed be the goodness of God, that it is not so with

us, and that there is always room for reconciliation, and encouragement to future diligence. Thus the grace of God gives hopes even to the worst of men; and without this favour the best of men could have no hopes at all.

2. A sudden and perfect change from a vicious to a virtuous state is not to be expected; it is contrary to common experience, and to the nature of habits; and therefore it is not to be supposed that a gracious and merciful God will exact it instantly from the penitent sinner. There are persons who talk much of this immediate transformation from sin to sanctity: but if they really believe what they say, they lie under a mistake, and the mistake is this, that they confound a good resolution with a complete amendment. A good resolution may be formed in an instant, upon some awakening call and pressing motive; but it is the following behaviour which proves the sincerity of the resolution. However, there is this comfort in a good resolution, that if a person should be taken out of this life, before he had opportunity to accomplish all his purposes, it is to be hoped that God will accept the design for the deed.

But

But what say the Scriptures, in general, concerning amendment and improvement? They say, Cease to do evil, learn to do well. No one ever learned any thing, that is worth the knowing, in an instant: it is a work of time, and a work of pains. The Scriptures say, Grow in grace. Look round all nature, and you shall find that growing is gradual; and as it is in the natural, so is it in the spiritual growth, which like a small grain of mustard seed, becomes a tall shrub; but days and nights must first pass over its head. The Scriptures say, Be ye built up, an holy house, an habitation of God, a temple of the Spirit. Buildings are not begun and finished at once, unless they be castles in the air.

So then, a man may set out well, though he cannot as yet complete the work of amendment. He can forbear an outward act of sin, though he cannot repress all irregular desires; he can fly from an object of temptation, which he cannot resist if it be placed before him. He can pray to God, and beg forgiveness, and read the Scriptures and other useful treatises, and attend to religious exhortations.

And as to beginning well, it is not so difficult as prejudice and inexperience may repre-

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And as to beginning well, it is not so difficult as prejudice and inexperience may repre-

sent it to an offender. Man is not a creature made up entirely of passions; he hath reason, and reflection, and conscience; and there are powerful inducements to amendment, suggested to us by our hopes and fears, the hope of rest and peace in a better state, and the fears of being cast off and for ever separated from God. Indeed there is no withstanding these motives, if a man will but give them a fair hearing. It is not a grievous thing to love him who made us and redeemed us; nor is it hard to entreat him daily that he would endue us with religious wisdom and pious resolution. No sooner is this done with sincerity, and seriously repeated, than it makes a happy alteration in the whole man. Virtue appears amiable and desirous, and hope arises in the soul, like the dawning of the day after a dark night. When the first aversions are once removed, the rest of the task is easy, and is attended with blessings which the world never gave to its votaries. They who set their heart only on the favours of the world, and seek them with all the wit and industry that they can exert, are either disappointed, or if they receive the prize, receive a secret curse along with it, which sinks the value of it to a very nothing.

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When a person is so far advanced in religion, as to take a pleasure in it, then is the promise of Christ fulfilled, He that cometh to me, shall find rest to his soul. He is freed from the tyranny of lust, from inordinate desires, and empty hopes, and these four passions, envy, malice, and revenge. If he hath the conveniences of life, he enjoys them soberly, and without the horrible fears of God's displeasure. If he meets with disappointments, he bears them patiently, by the hopes of a better world. These are the sweet and certain fruits of conforming our will to the will of God, and our behaviour to his precepts; and not only for the keeping of them, but in the keeping of them there is great reward.

Little thanks then do they deserve from us, who pretend to shew us other ways to heaven than those of continued or renewed obedience. What need is there for tricks and subterfuges to avoid precepts which are so reasonable and so profitable? What occasion is there for contrivances to shun that religious labour, which not only brings peace at the latter end, but calms and composes the mind even for the present? And this is rest, in the truest and the noblest sense; unless by rest we mean laziness.

Let us accept our Saviour's kind invitation, and comply with his terms, and try the experiment. It is worth the trying. It hath been rejected by many; and they have lamented their folly when it was too late. It hath been tried by many; and we may boldly appeal to experience and say, that No person ever spent his days in honest endeavours to perform his Christian duty, who looked back with regret upon those endeavours. No: his only regret hath been that he had not done still more, and been more active, more exemplary, and more uniform in his obedience.

S E R M O N XIII.

HEBR. xiii. 9.

Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines.

AMONGST the diverse and strange doctrines, which are industriously propagated in this country, and in this unsettled and fanatical age, there are none more dangerous than those of Popery; the progress and the insolence of which is matter of public complaint, and the establishment of which would infallibly be the destruction of our Church and State, of our Laws and Liberties, of our properties and of our lives.

The Protestant Writers, ever since the Reformation, have frequently and effectually exposed and confuted this pernicious religion;

and none of them better than those of our own nation ; so that nothing or very little that is new can be said upon this occasion. I propose therefore to collect what hath been urged by some of our best authors, and to contract it into the compass of one Discourse.

The Church of Rome pretends to be the Mother and Mistress of all Churches ; and the Bishop of Rome calls himself, as successor of St. Peter, the supreme and universal Pastor of the Church of Christ, by divine appointment ; so that it is necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to him. Of all this dominion there is not the least intimation in Scripture ; and it is highly absurd that all the world should be obliged to repair to the Court of Rome for the decision of all questions, and to submit to the judgment of a man, who is perhaps the most ignorant and the most wicked of all mankind. I do them no wrong : several of these Prelates have been so represented even by writers of their own communion.

The Church of Rome claims infallibility ; and in this she is very stiff and peremptory, though she cannot tell where it is seated, whether in the Pope alone, or in a Council alone, or in both together, or in the whole body of
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the Christians of her communion. However she is sure that she has it somewhere.

It is strange that this privilege should have been from the beginning of Christianity conferred upon the Roman Church, and yet that very Church should be at a loss where to find it. Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily than that there should be such endless differences amongst them about that which they pretend to be the only method of ending all differences.

Concerning repentance, the Church of Rome teaches that he who confesses his sins to the Priest with some degree of sorrow, and receives his absolution, shall go to heaven, though he hath led the most abominable life. This is easy enough; but the difficulty is to believe it true: and if it be true, the arguments for holiness will have small influence upon corrupted minds, when remission of sins may be obtained on so cheap terms.

Concerning the state of men after death, the Roman Church teaches that there is a Purgatory, or place of temporary punishment, from which the souls of Catholics may be released and translated into heaven by the prayers of the living, and the sacrifice of the Mass, and

pious legacies left for such purposes. This doctrine is too gainful to be easily given up; and this prevailing force of prayers and Masses rests principally upon the visions of some mad Nuns and Monks, and the fictions of some crafty ones.

The Church of Rome teaches that in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper there is a substantial change made of the bread and wine into the natural body and blood of Christ; and this they call Transubstantiation.

Concerning which doctrine it may be said truly and without exaggeration, that in all the various religions of the world, there is not any article or proposition imposed upon the belief of men, that is half so unreasonable and so hard to be swallowed as this. And indeed whosoever thinks that such a collection of impossibilities and contradictions can be wrought by the muttering of five Latin words, must believe it with his will and not with his understanding. Yet this in the Church of Rome is esteemed one of the most important articles of Christian faith; though there is no more foundation for it in Scripture than there is any proof there that our Saviour is really and substantially a rock, a vine, a door, a lion, a lamb;

lamb; or that God hath eyes and ears, and hands and feet.

But this is not all. It is a doctrine which undermines the very foundations of Christianity, and is the sponge of all religion, because it destroys the testimony of the senses.

If the testimony of sense may be trusted, Transubstantiation is false; and if the testimony of sense cannot be trusted, no man is sure that Christianity is true: for the utmost assurance that the Apostles had of its truth was the testimony of their own senses concerning our Saviour's miracles and their own; and this testimony every man has against Transubstantiation. Hence it plainly follows that no man, not the Apostles themselves, had more reason to think Christianity to be true, than that every man hath to think Transubstantiation to be false.

When a Papist tells you that Transubstantiation is taught in these words of Scripture, *This is my body*, you may challenge him to shew you any such words there. When he produces the book and shews them to you, you may tell him, that indeed you see them with your eyes, but that we must not trust to the testimony

testimony of our senses. And so endeth the dispute.

The Church of Rome teacheth that kings ought to be deposed in case of heresy, and that the subjects are absolved from their allegiance to him. And this is not a mere speculative opinion, but hath been frequently practised by the Bishops of Rome, as every one knows who knows any thing of former times; for the troubles and confusions which were occasioned by it make up a good part of the history of several ages.

The Church of Rome teacheth that heretics, that is, all who differ from her in matters of faith, are to be compelled by violence to submit to her, or to be extirpated by fire and sword, and charges all her children to endeavour this to the utmost of their power. This doctrine, like that of deposing kings, is not at all times and in all places alike frankly and openly avowed. Ask a Papist here in England, and he probably will deny it to be a doctrine of his Church. But it is Popish doctrine, and Popish practice, though it is not thought safe and convenient always to declare and defend it.

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The Church of Rome hath established in various places Courts of Judicature called Inquisitions; the like to which, for their clandestine manner of proceeding, for their unjust and arbitrary rules, for their barbarous usage of mens persons, and the cruelty of their torments to extort confessions, the sun never saw erected under any government upon earth by men of any religion whatsoever.

The Church of Rome by holy wars and pious massacres hath shed ten times more Christian Blood than all the Heathen persecutions put together.

The Church of Rome teaches that no faith is to be kept with Heretics, no promises, no covenants, and no oaths; a doctrine so detestable and so fraught with mischief to society, that to mention it is to confute it.

The Church of Rome is most remarkably deficient in charity. She pretends to have all faith, faith in its utmost perfection, to the degree of infallibility; but she allows no creature in the world besides her own children to have the least degree of faith, though he should believe every thing that is contained in the New Testament, because he does not believe it upon her word and authority. This is a
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most impudent pretence; and yet if it were true, St. Paul hath told us that he who hath all faith, if he have no charity, is nothing.

Astonishing it is that they who hate and persecute Christians, and declare them to be in a state of damnation, do all the while, most confidently pretend to be the disciples of Jesus, and will allow none to be so but themselves. That Church which excommunicates all other Christian Churches in the world, and if she could, would extirpate them out of the world, yet will needs assume to herself to be the only Christian Church; just as if our Saviour had said; Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye hang and burn one another.

The Church of Rome forbids private judgment, and the exercise of reason in matters of religion. Now nothing is more evidently absurd than to reason against the use of reason; for if the argument itself is good, reason must be a good thing; and if the argument be bad, it only proves the folly of him who uses it.

Indeed our adversaries are forced to grant us as much as we can desire. For, though they deny a man the liberty of judging in particular points of religion, yet they are forced to

allow him a liberty of judging upon the whole. When they would persuade a Jew, a Mahometan, or a Pagan to receive Christianity, or an Heretic, as they are pleased to call us, to come over to their communion, and offer arguments to induce him, they do by this very method, whether they will or no, make that man a judge which is the true religion and the true Church. Now no shadow of reason can be given why a man should be fit to judge upon the whole, and yet unfit to judge upon particular points; especially if it be considered that none can make a discreet judgment upon any religion, before he has examined its particular doctrines and decided concerning them. It is not credible that God should give us a capacity of deciding the most fundamental and important matter for no other end but to chuse once for all to whom we must resign our judgment for ever. This is as reasonable, and as modest, as if one should affirm that God hath given a man two eyes for no other end than that he should look sharply out once for all, and pitch upon some blind guide who should have the office of leading him about blind-folded all the days of his life.

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The Church of Rome celebrates the divine service in an unknown tongue. This is contrary to the practice of the primitive Church, and to the great end of religious worship, which is edification; for it is hard to imagine how men can be improved by that which they do not understand. This is a direct contradiction to St. Paul, who hath no less than a whole chapter wherein he confutes this practice as fully and condemns it as plainly as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible; and they who can have the face to maintain it, need not blush at any thing.

The Church of Rome recommends ignorance as the mother and the nurse of devotion, discourages as much as she can the reading of the holy Scriptures, and keeps them from the common people. This tyranny she has exercised over those of her communion for several ages. It grew upon the Christian world by degrees; for whilst by the inundation of barbarous nations, and the decline of learning, the Romans in a great measure lost their language, the Governors of the Church still kept up the Scriptures and the service of God in the Latin tongue, which at last was unknown to
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the common people. And then, to complete all, the Latin Bible, which is only a translation, and sometimes a wrong one, hath been preferred to the original text.

Thus the holy Scriptures have been made a sealed book, which the people are not worthy to open, and our Saviour's doctrine, which he calls the bread of life, is like the shew-bread amongst the Jews, of which none might eat, but the Priests, unless now and then, by an extraordinary favour and licence from the Bishop.

Nothing sure was ever more astonishing than this uncharitable and cruel usage of the people in the Church of Rome. It is not easy to decide whether is the strangest, the insolence of the governors in imposing upon men this senseless way of serving God, or the tame stupidity of the people in bearing such treatment. Why should reasonable creatures be used at this rude and barbarous rate? as if they were not worthy to be acquainted with the will of God; and as if what every man ought to do were not fit for every man to know; as if the common people had only bodies to be present with at divine service, and no souls; or as if they

they were distracted, and could not bear too much light.

And yet after all, their spiritual fathers have a good reason for acting thus, though they care not to own it; for since the Scripture is directly contrary to many of their doctrines, they ought in prudence to conceal it as much as they can, and keep it out of sight, and to represent it as an hurtful or an unintelligible book. Therefore some writers of that communion have been permitted to speak of it even with insolence and contempt, to represent it as an insufficient law of faith and manners, a leaden rule which may be bent and twisted every way.

It is true indeed that the Church of Rome, though she withholds the Bible from her children, gives them the Legends of the Saints, and other godly books, many of which are only fit to create a contempt of religion; and if Christianity were in reality such as it is there represented, a wise man would be strongly tempted to have nothing to do with it, and to say, Let my soul be with the Philosophers.

The Church of Rome hath added to the Canonical books of the Old Testament, those
which

which are called Apocryphal, the best of which are not of sacred authority, and some of which are of no credit at all.

They have farther added to the Scriptures, to the written word of God, an unwritten word, which they call Oral Tradition from Christ and his Apostles; and this they declare to be of equal authority with the Scriptures themselves, and to be received with the same pious veneration. Yet it is evident that nothing can be more uncertain and more liable to alteration and mistake than tradition at the distance of so many ages, brought down by word of mouth, and passing through so many mouths. So then, the general rumour and report of things said and done seventeen hundred years ago is of equal authority with a record and an history written at the time! Tradition amongst Christians must in the nature of things be what Tradition was and is amongst the Jews, a muddy fountain of everlasting nonsense.

The Church of Rome gives the communion in one kind. And yet it is not denied that our Saviour gave it in both kinds, and that the Church for a thousand years together did the same. This is a sacrilegious taking away

an essential part of the Sacrament; for the wine is as necessary as the bread, and they might as well and by the same authority take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

The Church of Rome hath appointed the worship of Images; which practice, notwithstanding all her refined distinctions about it, is as much against the second commandment, as the malicious killing a man is against the sixth. Their teachers therefore in their ordinary catechisms, and manuals of devotion, left out the second commandment, and to make up the number ten, they divided the tenth into two, lest the consciences of the common people should start at doing a thing so directly contrary to the express law of God.

They also worship the consecrated bread and wine, through a false persuasion that they are substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ. This by the confession of their own writers is an act of idolatry, unless the change be really made.

The Church of Rome hath appointed the invocation and worship of Saints and Angels, and particularly of the Virgin Mary, which hath been for several ages a main part of the public

public worship of the Papists, and of their private devotions too; and for one prayer which they make to God, they present ten addresses to the Virgin, our Lady, the Queen of Heaven, and the Mother of God, as they absurdly call her; and they have burlesqued the whole Book of Psalms, by applying to her what is there said of God and of the Messias. According to them, there are in heaven advocates and patrons for all occasions, protectors for all professions and trades, curers of all sorts of diseases both of men and of beasts, removers of all sorts of evils, and givers of all sorts of blessings, of whom the chief is the Queen of Heaven. Any one who had never seen the Bible would conclude that more had been said concerning the blessed Virgin in Scripture than concerning God and Christ, and that the New Testament were from the beginning to the end full of precepts and exhortations to worship her. And yet, there is not one single sentence there that sounds that way.

Some of their most eminent Saints are magnified for saying and doing the most ridiculous things, and their Saintship seems to be founded upon the following suppositions, that fools and

lunatics are inspired, that he who is very silly in all other respects is very knowing in religion, and must needs abound with grace because he has no wit; that preaching to fishes, birds, and beasts is humility, and that nastiness and rags are Christian virtues. We read of superstitious princes who have procured the old garments of Saints, and wrapped themselves up in them, as if piety were like the itch, and might be caught by wearing the foul clothes of a Monk.

The Church of Rome recommends to those who would make an extraordinary progress in goodness, abstinence from several sorts of meats, watching, and afflicting the body with various rigours, and pilgrimages to distant places. These were mean and Pagan notions of the Deity; and the absurd practices grounded upon them are no where recommended in Scripture, nor have we any example there besides that of the Priests of Baal, who wounded themselves to incline their God to hear them. These are voluntary superstitions which our heavenly Father requires at no man's hands: and certainly he who mortifies his passions and subdues his lusts may be good, though he never whipped himself, and may find

find his way to heaven though he never turned vagabond, nor walked barefoot to the tomb of our Thomas Becket, or of some other Saint of equal value.

The Church of Rome hath introduced a multitude of burdensome ceremonies, silly observances, and superstitious conceits, which tend to make religion appear contemptible and ridiculous, and to the great detriment of virtue and piety, and are contrary to the direction given us by our Saviour, to remember that God is a spirit, and that he ought to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

The Church of Rome enjoins celibacy to the Clergy, and to a vast number of Religious Orders, male and female; a command contrary to the plain sense of Scripture, and to the practice of the first Christians, and producing many effects which it is not decent to mention.

The Church of Rome recommends vows of a monastic, solitary, and single life, which is against common sense and the interests of civil society, and serves only to fill the world with drones and lunatics. And indeed, all vows in general are unnecessary and imprudent; and though they were permitted in condescension

to the weakness of ruder ages, yet were they never commanded in the Law, nor recommended in the Gospel.

The Church of Rome requires all persons punctually to confess their sins, and to lay open their hearts at certain times to the Priest; a practice never commanded in Scripture, and a bondage to which no ingenuous mind knows how to submit; and is as reasonable, as decent, and as modest, as if they had required all persons to go naked once a year, or once a month, to church.

The Church of Rome has suffered to pass uncensured the writings of many of her Divines, who in casuistry, as it is called, that is, in their decisions concerning matters of duty and of conscience, have been the infamy of Christianity; so that a man had much better be guided by the Roman Civil Law, and by Pagan Moralists, by Cicero or Epictetus, than by such licentious Christians.

The Church of Rome teaches that there are some persons so excellently good, that they do more than needs for their own salvation. Therefore when they have performed as much for themselves as in strict duty they are bound to do, and thereby have paid down a full and valuable

valuable consideration for heaven, and as much as in equal justice between God and man it is worth, they may go to work again for their friends, and begin a new score, and from that time forwards may put the surplufage of their good works as a debt upon God, to be laid up in the public treasury of the Church, which the Pope by his pardons and indulgences may dispense, and place to whose account he pleases. And out of this Bank which is kept at Rome, they who never took care to have any righteousness of their own, may be supplied at reasonable rates.

To this they have added a farther supply of grace, if there should be any need of it, by the Sacrament of Extreme Unction; that being anointed with oil, they may slip out of the hands of Evil Spirits. And thus by these devices they have so contrived it, that Christianity should lose its true virtue and efficacy upon the hearts and lives of men, and instead of the fruits of goodness and righteousness should produce the weeds of superstition and folly. Or if it produce any real virtues, yet even the virtue of those virtues is much debased by their insolent pretences of supererogation, and by such indecent behaviour towards God.

Now if we could suppose any person so overrun with grace and surfeited with goodness, as to have more than will qualify him for eternal life, yet there can be no assigning or transferring it to another. No man can become really and inherently righteous by the righteousness of others, nor can a man make over his obedience to another, any more than he can give his wit or his learning to his friends, or than a sick man can be made well by the medicines which another should take for him.

No man can be good by deputy, or go to heaven by proxy; and therefore these supererogations, these good works with an hard name, must be a fatal delusion to those who place a confidence in them, instead of working out their own salvation.

The Church of Rome hath taught that in the due administration of the Sacraments a right intention of the priest is necessary. So then, if in baptism the priest intend not to baptize the person, it is no baptism, nor is the person made a Christian. Likewise in the Lord's Supper, if the priest intends not to consecrate the Host, it is no Sacrament, and the worshiping the Wafer is idolatry; and in the Sacrament of Penance, though the priest pronounce

nounce the absolution, if he intend not to absolve the penitent, nothing is done. So in Ordination, which is another of their Sacraments, if the Bishop intend not to ordain the man, he is no priest, and whatsoever he does as a priest afterwards is of no effect. So in Marriage, which also is a Sacrament with them, if the intention of the priest is wanting, there is no religious contract, and the parties live in fornication, though they know it not.

I will not even attempt to prove that all this is absurd; but only observe that since many Papists disown the doctrine, and endeavour to explain away the determination of their Council of Trent upon it, it is not proper for us to press too much on this head. So, let it pass, as a thing of which themselves or the wiser part of them are ashamed.

The Church of Rome hath made use of forged books and records, and of false translations of old Christian writers, and is guilty of the mean trick of curtailing or suppressing any thing ancient or modern which she does not like.

The Church of Rome, with all her corruptions, seems to be so plainly foretold and set forth

forth in the prophetic parts of Scripture, that he must wink hard who can overlook it.

The Church of Rome hath ever pretended to the gift of miracles; but as they are of very low credit even amongst many of her own communion, she cannot expect that we should regard them. Several of them have been convicted of fraud and imposture; and several of them are so foolish, useless, absurd, frantic, and frivolous, that they carry their own condemnation stamped upon them.

Lastly, Atheism hath been more prevalent in Popish than in Protestant nations. The reason is plain. It is the annual spawn and the natural effect of the gross superstitions and corrupt manners of the Romish Church and Court.

From this survey of Popery, its deformity evidently appears, its dangerous and detestable nature. But as this discourse is levelled against doctrines and not against persons, I would obviate a false conclusion which some may make from the premises. They may judge that since the religion is so bad, they who profess it must be no less bad. This inference would be uncharitable and false. There
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S E R M O N XIII. 283

are amongst them, as amongst us, persons of honour, probity, and piety. The truth seems to be that such persons content themselves with a certain implicit faith, and profess to believe in general what the Church believes. But as they have a natural fund of honesty, and a virtuous disposition, they endeavour to live as Christians ought, and are indeed far better than their Religion, if they understood it and practised it, would permit them to be.

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 and a virtuous disposition, they endeavour to
 live as Christians ought, and are indeed far
 better than their Religion, if they understood
 it, is capable of. It would be much to be
 desired, that such persons were more
 numerous, and that they were more
 diligent in their duty.



S E R M O N XIV.

MATTH XV. 22.

And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a Devil.

OUR Saviour, to avoid the malice of his enemies, had retired for a time to the neighbouring regions of Tyre and Sidon. He was soon discovered there by the Gentile inhabitants; and a woman who was in great distress applied to him for relief. She was of Canaan, of a nation abhorred by the Jews, and she was by religion a Pagan. But the providence of God so ordered it, that she became one of the first Pagan proselytes, and the mystery of the calling and conversion of the Gentiles began in her to be gloriously unfolded.

She was under a sore calamity, and nothing sooner awakens, and more effectually disposes us to implore the mercy of God than adversity. Sufferings make us active and ingenious in seeking out relief, and in trying every expedient, even when there is small reason to hope for success. So that in this point of view, those calamities might be accounted divine favours, which surpassing all human relief, force us to have recourse immediately to God himself, to God whom we are strangely inclined to forget in the day of prosperity.

The woman was an afflicted mother, perhaps a widow; and her daughter, perhaps her only child, was grievously tormented by a Devil. Whether it were a Devil, or whether it were only a Disease, the case was equally deplorable, and the cure equally miraculous. The Jews used to ascribe all extraordinary diseases, such as lunacy, palsies, and epileptic fits, to evil spirits; they even called such diseases Devils: the neighbouring nations had the same notion; and this was the common language of the times. It is possible therefore that the sacred writers may have sometimes imitated them, and complied with custom. But then there are some particular histories and facts related

related in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, which cannot be understood of any thing but real possessions, unless we offer much violence to the narration. If on the one hand we must not multiply the operations of evil Spirits beyond absolute necessity, we must take care on the other hand not to extenuate them to the prejudice of the Evangelists, and of the glory of Christ.

I think it is obvious and easy to find a reason why in the days of Christ and his Apostles evil Spirits had more influence and power over the bodies of men than before or since. When God sent his Son into the world, it was to destroy the empire of Sin and Satan. Evil spirits therefore were permitted to break loose and range at large, and do their worst, that the glory of the Son of God might be made manifest, in expelling them, in rebuking them, in putting them to open shame, and compelling them to proclaim the dignity of Christ, and to be a sort of unwilling preachers and witnesses of the Gospel. Thus men beheld at the same time the vile nature and the terrible force of those apostate Spirits, and the superior power and great goodness of the Saviour of the world, who

who delivered miserable men from such dreadful enemies.

The woman of Canaan cried to him, Have mercy on me O Lord, thou son of David. By standing at some distance, and not presuming to approach Christ, by her loud complaints, and her earnest and repeated request, she shewed her modesty, her reverence, her humility, her affliction, and her faith in Christ.

If it be matter of wonder to see in this woman dispositions so essential to a good mind, it is no less strange to find a Pagan so enlightened, and talking a language which the miracles of Christ had not been able to extort from the Jews: Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David. She had probably learned from dwelling in the neighbourhood of Judea, that they there expected a Messias, a son of David, and she had probably heard of the preaching and of the wonderful works of Christ, and thence she justly concluded that he must be the great Prophet. This was more than most of the Jews had believed, and yet they had heard his doctrine and seen his miracles, and knew the correspondence between them and the ancient prophecies. But when men are ill-disposed and given up to vice and
unbelief,

unbelief, the best of proofs will make little or no impression.

Such was the religious and reasonable temper of the woman. Now consider the behaviour of Christ towards her. He saw her, he heard her; but he answered her not one word, nor took the least notice of her. The character of our Saviour, his usual behaviour, the design for which he came into the world, all appear at the first sight quite inconsistent with this disregard for his petitioner. We see not here the affability, the compassion and pity for human miseries, which on some occasions even drew tears from him. He seems to be no longer the same person who delighted in dispensing his counsels and instructions, in bestowing his consolations and his favours, and in leaving behind him in every place the miraculous traces of his love. One would think that his zeal for the glory of his Father was somewhat damped, since instead of seeking occasions to weaken the power of the Devil, he neglects a fair and a pressing opportunity to mortify and disgrace him, and to deliver an unhappy person out of his hands. When to all this we add the disposition and the behaviour of the person who fled to him for succour, his

refusal appears quite astonishing. When he censured and sent away the ambitious mother, who wanted to have her two sons exalted above all the disciples, and placed on his right and on his left hand; when he rebuked with zeal and severity the malicious Jews who called for more miracles and other sort of miracles, then we admire his displeasure, and applaud his just resentment. But why should he reject this poor woman with a sort of coldness and disdain, and not afford one word of answer to a very modest and reasonable request? So much faith and humility and distress deserved the compassionate regard of him, who, it is said, loved the young man who came to him for instruction, as soon as he had seen him and heard him speak.

But if it be our duty not to pass a sudden and a rash judgment upon the actions of our neighbour, much more ought we to observe this rule, when we presume to examine the conduct of him who was Wisdom itself. And upon due consideration we soon discover motives and causes of his behaviour which were worthy of the Saviour of mankind. First it is to be observed that Christ while he was upon earth said nothing and did nothing of himself,

as he declared. He acted as the servant and the Minister of his Father, he executed his Father's designs, followed his counsels, and entered into his views, without ever departing from them. Now though the promise of redemption respected all mankind, yet God had chosen the Jewish People to receive the first offers and the first fruits of this favour, as the posterity of Abraham his friend. The Gospel was to go forth from Sion, and the ministry of Christ was in a manner confined to that nation. He therefore forbade his disciples to turn aside to the Samaritans and Gentiles; nor did they visit those people and preach to them, till the Jews, with much insolence and repeated contempt and cruel persecution, forced them to fly to other places.

This accounts for his refusing an answer to the woman of Canaan, and not yielding to her request, till he was conquered by humble importunity.

Secondly, Our Lord, who knew the hearts of men, both saw and esteemed the good disposition of this Petitioner; but for a time he concealed his kind intentions, being willing to exercise her faith and submission, her patience and perseverance, to make her virtue manifest

to the by-standers, and to make her also sensible of the true value of the favour which she at last obtained.

At the same time he had an opportunity to expose and censure indirectly the hardness of heart and impenitence of the Jews, by shewing the difference between them and this honest Pagan. A mere stranger believes in him, whilst they of the household of faith reject him. She seeks him out and applies to him, whilst they undervalue the favours which he offers and even presses upon them.

But the Disciples of Christ knew not at that time the reasons of their Master's conduct, and moved with compassion at the tears and intreaties of the woman, desire him to grant her request. They besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. Send her away; that is, as I understand it, Give her a favourable dismissal, and an answer of peace. Doubtless they were surpris'd at the coldness and the silence of Christ, and not presuming directly to press him, they take another method, and desire him to relieve them from the importunity of the Petitioner. Our Saviour understood them in this manner, as soliciting in behalf of the woman, as it appears from his reply:
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he answered them, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: it is not my business to preach to the Gentiles, and to work miracles in favour of them. Whilst he was thus standing still and talking with the disciples, in the presence of the woman, she drew nearer, and knelt down, and said, Lord, help me. His reply to his disciples was enough to have dejected her, and deprived her of all hopes, if she had possessed less faith and perseverance. But there followed another and a severer trial; for to her humble request our Saviour returned a most mortifying answer; Let the children first be filled; for it is not meet to take the childrens bread, and to cast it to the dogs.

The Jews despised and abhorred the Gentiles; and the best title they had to bestow upon them was to call them dogs. But Christ seems not to have meant it so. He intended to prove her, but not to insult her. Sometimes he used rough censures towards some sinners; but they were Pharisees, men puffed up with pride and arrogance, full of hypocrisy and deceit, and deserving his indignation. This person, besides her faith and humility, had another qualification to recommend her, namely,

her affliction. It was a beautiful saying, whoever was the author of it, that *Misery is sacred*. A suffering person is entitled to a double portion of civility. Our Saviour also, who intended to break down the separation between Jew and Gentile, would not have done any thing to widen the distance and keep up the difference. He doth not use the word, *dog*, by way of reproach; and the ^a word is softer in the original. His design seems to have been to intimate that in God's great family here upon earth, the Jews and Gentiles might be compared to the children and the house-dogs in a family, who are both fed and taken care of; but the children have the preference, as it is just. The history of the Old Testament shews that the Jews had honours and privileges above all other nations, a constant manifestation of God's power and goodness amongst them, and laws of his own appointing, and himself for their king, and his Prophets for teachers. Our Lord's comparison therefore between children and dogs related to the Jews and Gentiles in general, and was not intended as a personal and a particular reproach to her with whom he was speaking.

^a Κυνάγιον.

She acknowledged the remark to be just, and humbly acquiesced. It is true, Lord.

A state of affliction is a school of humility. When we preach of the advantages of adversity, and represent temporal calamities as marks of God's goodness, it often happens that our hearers feel no conviction, and rather account such remarks to be words of course, and the language of the Pulpit. But in this they are mistaken: the doctrine is true, and experience justifies it. It must be owned indeed that prosperity, considered in itself, is of an agreeable and harmless nature, and that it also furnishes abilities and opportunities to do good, and powerful motives to gratitude and to the love of God. But if we consider man as prone to evil, to such a person prosperity becomes a snare and a temptation, because it makes him proud. If the woman of whom we are discoursing had not been in a state of affliction, she would perhaps have been disgusted at the words of Christ, which seemed to set her and her pagan fellow-citizens upon the level with dogs: for the Gentiles in general were far from acknowledging this, and from owning themselves inferior to the Jews; and many of them treated the Jews with much contempt, and

represented them as the scum, the refuse, the dregs, and the off-scouring of the earth.

The pride of man is such, that he cannot bear comparisons by which he is set below his neighbours, and a trifle of this kind is enough to lose a friend, and to make an enemy: and therefore by the rules of civility wise men are very careful not to seem to exalt themselves and undervalue others, and not to insult and ridicule any person, on account of his calling, his profession, his nation, or his religion.

The humility of this woman was great; and our Lord intended to make it appear in the fullest manner. She submits to his reproof, and owns herself, as a stranger and a Gentile, unworthy of those favours which he had granted to others. And this is true humility. To own our defects without feeling them, this is feigned humility, and resembles the behaviour of those who speak of themselves in a disparaging way, only with a view to obtain compliments, or to avoid censure. To feel our defects and not to own them, is an imperfect humility, by which we condemn ourselves, but would not be condemned by others. The same Wisdom therefore that says, Be sensible of your wants and defects, says also, Confess

fess your sins. Men cannot bear to be placed in that degree which is proper to them, nor to yield to their superiors. Self-love and Pride pervert the judgment and darken the understanding, and it is an old observation that every one carries two bags, one before, for his neighbour's faults, and one behind, for his own. When they are not considered and advanced in society according to their supposed deserts, they comfort themselves by complaining of the injustice, partiality, and ignorance of the world. And it is well if they have the wisdom and the religion to stop there, and not to repine at the course of Providence. To confess that we have as much as we deserve at the hands of God, is an act of duty which we difficultly bring ourselves to perform. But if every discontented person were to examine himself, and the advantages which he enjoys, and the just reasons for which more may be refused to him, and withholden from him, he would say, as the woman of Canaan; It is true, Lord: we have as much as we can claim.

Yet the humility of this woman did not exclude her hope and her faith, which were founded, not upon her own deserts, but upon the

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the goodness of Christ. She answered, True, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Necessity and distress are eloquent and ingenious, and this reply is a proof of it. Nothing more lively, more artful and insinuating could have been said upon the occasion. It pleases every sensible reader; it pleased the Son of God. He applauded her both for the reply, and for the temper of mind which suggested it. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt: for this saying, go thy way. The Devil is gone out of thy daughter.

This is not a testimony to be called in question; it proceeds from Him who was the Light and the Truth, who never misrepresented any action, and never flattered any person. The commendations which we receive from men have this mortifying circumstance, that they are often owing to their ignorance, or to their good-nature, or to some interested views. If there be any pleasure in being praised, this woman had it in the utmost perfection, in carrying off the approbation of one who could not praise any thing that was not praise-worthy. He admired and loved a faith

so thoroughly examined and proved, and in her he beheld with pleasure the success of his ministry, and the execution of his Father's designs in the conversion of the Gentile world.

Her faith was great, both as she was a Pagan, and as she stands compared with the Jews.

It was great with relation to her religion and to her country. Her religion was Paganism; and we all know the imperious force of education, and the usual attachment to prejudices imbibed in our youth. It is not improbable however that she might have obtained some conceptions of the true God, and have been so far led as to think the Jewish religion preferable to idolatry; and this might induce her to entertain an honourable notion of Christ as of a great Prophet. She was also in distress; and grief and anxiety will make the sufferers try every expedient, and seize every opportunity to obtain relief, and throw away all pride and resentment. But that which sets her faith in the brightest view, is the contrast between her belief and the unbelief of the Jews. If our Saviour had cause to expect submission and docility any where, it must have been in a nation to which the Messiah had been promised

promised by the Law and the Prophets, and who pretended to wish for his appearance. Therefore the praises which he confers upon this woman are so many oblique censures of those who rejected him. In many of his discourses he alludes to this different treatment which he received from different persons, and to the good temper of those who had the fewer motives and inducements. He reproaches the Pharisees by observing that the very Publicans and Harlots entered into the kingdom of heaven before them. He declares that Tyre and Sidon, idolatrous cities, would have paid him more regard than he found at Corazin and Bethsaida, cities of Judæa. He commended the faith of this woman as surpassing that of some of his followers, and he said of the Centurion that he had not found so great faith, no not in Israel. And indeed if an high degree of faith was not so praise-worthy in a Jew, as a lower degree in the breast of a Pagan, how much more did the lively, and persevering faith of this person deserve the approbation of our Lord? If this comparison was so disgraceful to the Jews, it is no less so to those Christians, who professing a belief in Christ, act rather worse than Pagans and Infidels.

Her faith was not only illustrious, if you consider her as a Pagan by education, or if you compare her with the unbelieving Jews, but it was so, considered in itself. They who would not believe till they had seen repeated miracles, had a sort of belief which deserves small commendation. The difficulty after such conviction seems rather to lie on the other side, and it is hard to resist and reject such evidence. So that we cannot consider the case of those who withstood such proofs, without wondering at their obstinacy, and deploring such a total corruption of heart. She of whom we are speaking had as yet seen no miracles, she was an alien and a stranger, Christ appeared there for the first time in the regions where she dwelt, and yet she believes. No small accomplishment, if we may judge of it by our Saviour's determination; Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.

Her faith was not only great, as she had not the assistance of sight, and the over-bearing evidence arising from the testimony of the senses, but because it passed through a severe trial, and was victorious by its unshaken constancy. Perseverance crowns every virtue, and perseverance
acquired

acquired her the most glorious reward, even the applause of the Son of God. And thus the behaviour of our Lord unfolds itself to our full satisfaction, and we see and admire the reasons of his first silence, and of his harsh refusal. Love and mercy lay concealed under this forbidding appearance, and the temptation terminated in the honour of the suppliant, in the glory of God, and the advancement of the Gospel. The Philosopher judged not amiss who said that no spectacle was more worthy for God himself to behold than a good man tried with bad fortune and retaining his integrity and resolution.

● A faith which overcomes all doubts and difficulties, is begun, continued, and completed by the exercise of our reasoning faculties. They who represent faith as blind and credulous are widely mistaken. Faith is an assent upon rational grounds; and if you examine the faith of all those persons who are recommended in Scripture upon that account, you will find it to have been a persuasion excited by proper motives and sufficient evidence. This woman had sufficient reason from the testimony of others, to believe that Christ wrought beneficial

fiel miracles, and taught an holy doctrine. She therefore applied to him, and trusted in his power and goodness. For faith is not bare believing, but a belief accompanied with honest and religious dispositions.

The effect and the reward of her faith was this; Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

When we consider the advantages of faith, a wish may arise that we might see those happy times return when faith obtained extraordinary favours and miraculous cures. But that wish is not reasonable. Miracles were necessary to introduce Christianity, and to support the infant Church. When she arrived to a state of maturity, they were no longer expedient.

Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. Singular are the privileges of faith, by which man takes the kingdom of heaven by a kind of violence. The favour of God and eternal life are gained by it. But we must take heed not to understand by faith a mere belief distinguished from good works. This is a fanatical folly, as it may appear from various considerations, and even from this one remark, that faith itself is a good work. It consists in a sober inquiry, a teachable temper, a submission to proper evidence,

evidence, a public acknowledgment of the truth, and a behaviour suitable to the persuasion. These I must call good works, till I can find some other name to call them by; and this is the only faith which God hath promised to accept and to reward.

S E R M O N XV.

MATT. XV. 22.

And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a Devil.

THE importunate and yet humble request of the woman of Canaan, and the reward of her faith and perseverance, were considered in a former discourse. But the subject affords several remarks which were then either passed over, or more slightly discussed.

It seems surprising to find in the Gospels so great a number of petitioners who applied themselves to Christ, to beg that he would exert his miraculous powers in healing the diseases and the infirmities of their bodies; and

only one person who requested a cure for the diseases of the soul, and for pardon and peace of mind. And that wise person was a woman who had been a sinner and had lost her reputation, and who at the Pharisee's house washed his feet with her tears, and anointed them with ointment, and received from him the gracious assurance that all her past sins were forgiven, upon her faith and repentance, her singular piety, and her affectionate gratitude.

Is it so then? Are the distempers of the soul less real and less dangerous than those of the body? And ought the advantages of the present life to be dearer to us than those of eternity? Judge for yourselves, and at the same time you must needs condemn that inordinate self-love which induces us to prefer the interests of the body to those of the soul, and a transitory life to a glorious immortality.

And yet it is observable that these persons, though sinners more or less, though having their present welfare chiefly in view, obtain from Christ even temporal blessings, the removal of their diseases, and the renewal of their health and strength.

The Christian world produced a set of speculative and Mystical Divines, who cried up a
silent

silent and contemplative life, a disregard for the body and for sensible objects, and required a pure and disinterested love of God, without any respect to God's benefits and to our own salvation. One would wish that these Refiners had condescended to explain to us how it came to pass that Jesus Christ, who was the Wisdom as well as the Power of God, so often hearkened to such self-interested requests; and not only relieved but sometimes commended those whom he miraculously healed. The desire to recover bodily health and the use of the limbs, and thereby to be enabled to labour for a subsistence without depending upon the charity of others, must surely have been an innocent inclination, or else Christ would not have obliged such petitioners in such a manner; he who always rejected and refused unreasonable and improper requests.

Indeed in these very persons we find a commendable disposition, namely, a lively faith in him. One says to herself, If I can but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole; and this secret act of faith produced a sudden and a miraculous effect. A virtue proceeding from him restored health, and dispelled an invete-

rate disease which had baffled all the art of the physicians.

We find him requiring faith from those whom he cured, and saying, Believe ye that I can do this? If so, according to your faith be it done unto you. We find him commending an uncommon degree of this faith, especially where it was least to be expected, in aliens, in Samaritans, in Pagans; as in the Centurion, and in the woman of Canaan, who requested, the one the cure of his dying son, the other the deliverance of her daughter from an evil Spirit.

Let us admire and adore herein the goodness of God, who doth not deal rigorously with poor mortals, nor require of them either a belief of intricate subtilties, or refined acts of sublime devotion; but proportions his mercies to their wants, and even to their weaknesses, and rewards an honest disposition to acknowledge his power, and to trust in his clemency. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, says our Lord to us: but yet he gives us leave to seek the things of this world in a subordinate degree, and to ask of his Father our daily bread, or the necessities of life.

Besides;

Besides; It was expedient, or rather it was necessary that Christ should exert his power in healing all manner of sicknesses and diseases, because it was part of the character of the Messiah; it was foretold by the ancient prophecies, which it was his office to fulfill. And therefore he says to John's Disciples, who came to ask him whether he were the Christ, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

Add to this that of all miraculous works, those by which miserable men receive health and strength are best adapted to conciliate their affections, to excite their gratitude, and to secure their obedience. Many there were who were thus benefited by Christ; and it is hardly to be supposed that these persons could flight and disregard him, and much less that they could join with his enemies, his accusers, and his murderers. When our Lord was delivered up to death, it was at the time of the Passover, when the Jews used to assemble even from remote places to the Festival. And it may be supposed that these ignorant people, who knew

little concerning Christ, might be influenced by the Rulers, the Priests, the Pharisees and their disciples, and made no small part of the clamorous multitude which combined against him. But they who had experienced his goodness, and been healed by him, did in all probability join with his Disciples after his resurrection.

Thus did our Saviour bestow even temporal as well as spiritual blessings upon the multitudes. But these temporal blessings were confined to the healing of sicknesses and infirmities. He did not deliver them from their Roman Rulers, nor restore to them their lost liberties; he did not give them fruitful harvests, and increase of goods, and security from dangers, and wealth and plenty; he did not cure them of their poverty. If any of them had asked for favours of this kind, he would have rejected such petitioners with disdain, and have told them, as he did upon a like occasion, that the life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

If he twice fed them in a miraculous manner, it was done to reward their labour and diligence in coming to him from far to receive
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his instructions, and to keep them from being faint and sick in their way home.

The woman who fought Jesus Christ, when he was in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, was one of the Canaanites, the remains of those ancient inhabitants whom God commanded Joshua to extirpate, on account of their enormous wickedness. Yet God thought proper to leave upon the frontiers of the land of Israel some of those Pagan Enemies, to exercise the courage or the patience of his people, and to correct them from time to time, when they forsook his Laws and adopted the vices and idolatries of their neighbours.

Tyre and Sidon, those neighbouring cities, remained unconquered by the Jews; for they were maritime cities, which could assist each other by sea, where they were powerful, and where the Jews could not follow them, being strangers to navigation, and having no fleets. Idolatry had not ceased, and the knowledge of the true God had not prevailed amongst them in the time of Christ; or if superstition had suffered a decrease, it was probably due to an increase of irreligion and Epicurean Atheism, which had made a great progress in the Roman Empire.

Who could have imagined that this woman of Canaan, a stranger to the divine covenant and the promises, an Alien, a Pagan, should have had more faith than the children of Abraham, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Doctors of the Law, the Priests who were constantly employed in the service of God in the temple?

It hath been imagined that she was already one of those Profelytes to the Jewish Religion, who are mentioned both in the Scriptures, and in other ancient writers. Our Saviour observes concerning the Pharisees, that they were very diligent in that way, and even compassed sea and land to make a profelyte. But we must not conclude from these words, that they travelled abroad in foreign countries, as Missionaries, to convert the Pagans, whom they esteemed no better than dogs and swine, and whom they shunned and abhorred as unclean persons. The testimony of Christ only shews that the Pharisees in Judæa were full of active zeal, and were assiduous in their endeavours to draw over profelytes from other Jewish Sects, and from such strangers as might sojourn in the land. The conversion of Pagans was rather to be ascribed to those Jews who were settled in Italy and in other Pagan countries, and
who

who consequently conversed somewhat more freely with the Gentiles.

Upon the whole, the knowledge of the true God seemed to be but little extended beyond the narrow bounds of Judæa. The Jews were favoured with a Divine Revelation, and the world lay in darkness and the shadow of Death.

This woman of Canaan implored the assistance of Christ in behalf of her daughter, who was tormented with an evil Spirit; and was of opinion that the malady could only be removed by him. She addressed herself neither to the Physicians, nor to the Magicians of her own country, but to Christ; and she testifies her faith by saying to him, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David.

It hath been supposed by some that this Canaanite was suddenly and wonderfully enlightened in the faith, and looked upon Christ as upon a Divine Person, sent down from heaven for the benefit of mankind; and also that she was one of those profelytes who had learned to worship the one God, and who afterwards embraced Christianity. But the silence of the Gospel as to any such extraordinary illuminations bestowed upon her, and the first reply of
Christ

Christ to her, that it was not meet to give the childrens bread to the dogs, seem not to agree with this notion.

She dwelt upon the frontiers of the holy land, not beyond two or three days journey from Jerusalem: and though the doctrine of Christ had scarcely reached the territories of Tyre and Sidon, yet the fame of his miracles must have been spread amongst the neighbouring nations, and have excited the curiosity and the inquiries of the people; and amongst those miracles that of casting out evil Spirits was remarkable. The unbelieving Jews did not deny the reality of those wonderful works, but labouring under prejudices and false notions, they allowed not the miracles of Christ to be sufficient proofs of his divine mission, but ascribed them to other causes, and had objections to his person and to his conduct. Commerce with the neighbouring nations must have been common at a time when both Judæa and Syrophœnicia obeyed the Roman government. This woman therefore by conversation with Jews and with her own citizens, might have learned that in those days an illustrious Prophet and Prince was expected to arise in Judæa, and that this Heroe should descend from

from the house of David. Many were of opinion that Jesus was that promised Deliverer; and therefore she gives him, as they did, the title of Son of David. So the two blind men, who begged to recover their sight, called him Son of David; and the multitudes, who attended him when he entered into Jerusalem, cried, Hosanna to the Son of David. She knew that Jesus had supported his claim by miracles so public, so numerous, and so eminent, that he was considered as a man above the ordinary condition of men, and therefore she calls him, Lord. Convinced of his power and goodness, she begs to partake of it by the deliverance of her daughter. We must not imagine her knowledge to have been extended beyond this, nor have recourse to miraculous inspirations, to make her more enlightened than even those Jews who followed Christ as a teacher sent from God.

She made her request; and Jesus held his peace. His design, as the sequel shewed, was to prove her faith, and to try her patience. A severe trial it was, which might have quite discouraged a person of less constancy and perseverance. Her faith was in its infancy, and not strengthened by habit; it was founded on
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the testimony of those who had made favourable reports of the power and goodness of Jesus; and instead of finding the effects of his compassion, a cold reserve and silence foreboded a refusal. The Disciples who accompanied their Master seem to have had pity of her, and to have indirectly requested of him to assist her. But he answered them, in her hearing, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The Jews had in their possession the Oracles of God, and the instructions of the Prophets, they were a nation considerable and numerous, who constantly repaired to the temple of God, and practised at least all the externals of Religion. Yet Christ represents even them, or a great part of them, as so many lost sheep, wandering without a guide, and in a dangerous condition. The Jewish Church was then the only true one, and yet it was a corrupted Church, defiled with human traditions, and gross superstitions. Ceremonies were to supply the want of morality, and works of righteousness were neglected, without which no professions of faith can recommend any Believers to the favour of God.

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This woman who addressed herself to Christ was a Gentile; and Christ at first seemed to reject her, purely as being such. The calling of the Gentiles had been foretold by the Prophets; but Christ, as the faithful Son and servant of his heavenly Father, had always his Father's will and commands before his eyes.

The Gentiles were to be called at the appointed season; but as yet the time when they who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death should see this great light was not come. The promises of God, and the ministry of the Messias respected the Jews in the first place, and the preference was granted to them. The Pagans were not to be invited to those spiritual benefits, till the Jews had rejected them; and the long-suffering of God waited till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities by murdering the Lord of life and persecuting his servants, before he called a people who were not his people, as the Prophets speak, and a nation which in his sight was not a nation. In the mean time his compassion was in a manner confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

This was a second trial and a new subject of despondence for this Canaanite. She had cried,
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and Christ had held his peace: the Disciples had interposed in her behalf, and had not prevailed. The answer of Christ had shewed that she ought not to expect miraculous favours; It is not to you Pagans and Idolaters that I am sent; I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Yet instead of desisting from her attempt, she approaches, and falls at the feet of Jesus, and worships him, and says, Help me, O Lord.

Here again, it hath been supposed that she worshiped him as a Divine Person: but this is not to be collected from that word, which so often means civil and not religious worship, and that sort of reverence which was given to Princes and to Prophets.

Christ replied; It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to give it to the dogs. This was an oblique intimation that the Pagans compared with the Jews were of no more esteem than the dogs compared with the children of the family.

If this be so, what an amazing difference is here made between the posterity of Adam? A small number of them are the children of God, and the rest are the hopeless and forlorn children

dren of Nature and Necessity, for whom their Maker hath no regard.

A difficulty there appears to be in this conduct of Providence, that God should have neglected those numerous nations of the universe, and left them without promises, without oracles, without laws, plunged in the grossest ignorance and idolatry.

If religious knowledge had been dispersed, in some measure, over the face of the earth, more fully in one region, more imperfectly in another, this might have been ascribed to the different reception which men gave to the truths propounded to them. If Religion had been making a progress from nation to nation, which hath been the case of the Gospel, whose divine Author, that Sun of righteousness, arose in the East and proceeded to the West; if there had been from age to age periodical revolutions which had changed the false worship of Idolatrous nations; if God, to dissipate their ignorance, had sent them an Abraham, a Moses, an Elias, to reform their corrupted worship, the different moral state of mankind might have been ascribed to the honest dispositions or to the ingratitude and depravity of men. But that all nations should have been regarded as

brute beasts, whilst the people of Israel alone enjoyed the privileges of a covenant with God, and were considered as the only children of the Most High for so great a number of ages, this seems unaccountable, and quite perplexes our reason.

It is no wonder that God should have rejected the Jews after they had rejected his Son, and put him to death, and imprecated divine vengeance upon themselves and their children. But before this unparalleled crime many ages had passed away, during which this people had rendered themselves unworthy of the favours conferred upon them. They had been disobedient from their very deliverance out of Ægypt; and when Christ appeared, their Religion was buried under a load of human inventions and accumulated superstitions which had rendered it of little effect. Why did God for so long a space prefer this ungrateful and rebellious nation to their neighbours the Phœnicians, a polished people, the inventers and improvers of arts and sciences, and the spreaders of them by navigation, by commerce, by planting of colonies in distant regions?

Why should God confine his name and his worship in the narrow bounds of Judæa, so
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that it should be a sort of presumption and an irregular proceeding to make it pass over to the quarters of Tyre and Sidon? If you except the prophet Jonas, who was sent to preach repentance to the Ninevites; and Elias who sojourned with a widow of Sarepta, the other Prophets did not use to travel in Pagan countries, to convert the inhabitants. Thus did God permit only one nation to enjoy the title and privilege of children; the rest were left as dogs, not worthy to eat the bread of life. The time it will be said was not come. But that time should it not have been from the beginning, without exceptions and limitations?

Many there are, and there have been, who hold the doctrine of absolute and unconditional decrees of Predestination and Reprobation, of an irresistible depravity in the children of men, which nothing can cure but an irresistible grace; that this grace is extended to very few, whilst all the rest are doomed to eternal destruction even before they are born. These persons, if they have any feelings, must feel the difficulties which press hard upon such a rigid system. And what is their reply? It is that these are mysteries impenetrable by the

human understanding, that the ways of God are unsearchable, and that his judgments are not to be explained, but only to be adored in a religious silence; in a word, that Reason hath nothing to do in these deep things of God.

This looks like modest humility; but it looks like giving up the defence of Providence, and leaving Impiety to enjoy her insulting triumphs.

True it is that the ways of God are unsearchable, as to matters of mere favour; but not as to matters of justice and equity. And therefore in opposition to this uncomfortable system we have a few plain texts of Scripture to alledge, which with the consequences as plainly resulting from them, will suffice to justify the conduct of Providence.

The first which I shall produce is taken from the Old Testament, from one of the Psalms; The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works. What right have we to limit these words, which exclude none from being objects of this divine goodness? To confine the word *All* to the children of Abraham, to a few chosen persons,

sons, is a comment which common sense rejects.

Another text is contained in the words of our Lord; Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required. Hence it follows that to whomsoever little is given, of him little shall be required; and so Christ himself declares in the same place. If it be asked why much is given to one and little to another, this must be resolved into the good pleasure of God, who is Lord of his own gifts. But that every one shall be treated according to the use which he hath made of that much or of that little, this is the everlasting Law of equity.

Another text is from the Acts of the Apostles; God is no respecter of persons. This declaration is to be found both in the Old and in the New Testament, and it is too clear to require a comment. Only it may be observed as a just consequence that every person hath it in his power to perform as much as his Maker will require from him.

Another text is in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans; When the Gentiles who have not the Law do by nature the things of the Law,

these not having the Law are a law unto themselves, who shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. Hence we see that man who hath the use of reason, hath the capacity of discerning his duty, and of distinguishing between virtue and vice; that if he hath not the light of Revelation, he hath the light of Nature for his guide; and that in fact, amongst these Gentiles there were those who performed commendable actions, and had the approbation of their conscience, and others who were wicked and self-condemned.

The last declaration of Scripture which I shall mention, is contained in the doctrine of Universal Redemption, asserted in those numerous passages which say that Christ died for all, for all and for every one; and effectually for all those who should make a right use of their knowledge and abilities.

This, it will be said, puts the Pagans in as good a situation as the Christians. But this we deny; for although God will have mercy upon such well-disposed persons, it follows not
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that they shall have the same recompense which Christ hath promised to his servants, who know his will, and do his will, and many of whom have suffered for his sake. A future state of recompense at large and in general is different from that state of happiness in the kingdom of heaven which is promised to those who believe and obey the Gospel.

that they shall have the same recompense which Christ hath promised to his servants, who follow his will, and do his will, and many of whom have suffered for his sake. A true love of recompense at large, and in general is different from that love of happiness in the kingdom of heaven which is promised to those who believe and obey the Gospel.

SERMON XVI.

PROVERBS xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.

THE main design of Solomon in this useful Book is to recommend wisdom, both as to things temporal and spiritual, to point out the advantages arising from it, and to shew the methods to obtain it; amongst which methods that in the Text is one: He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.

Which leads us to enquire,

- I. What is meant by walking with the wise:
- II. How it conduces to the attainment of wisdom.

I. To walk with the wise is a precept which may fairly admit two senses, though Solomon

hath only in view that which I shall mention last.

First, it may mean, To converse with the writings of the wise, which may be called, To keep company with good Books.

Secondly, it certainly means, To chuse wise persons for our companions, and to lose no opportunity of receiving their advice and instruction.

Of these two directions, the former chiefly concerns those who have had a liberal education, and take a pleasure in reading; the latter concerns all persons alike.

As to the former; Books may be compared to a very disadvantageous Lottery, in which you may draw an hundred that are bad to one that is good; and therefore care and prudence are requisite, that we may neither take in hand those which tend to weaken our faith and spoil our morals, nor those of the trifling kind from which nothing at all can be learned; for Time is too precious to be thus thrown away, especially as so much of it slips from us by various unavoidable interruptions.

Amongst the Books which require our perusal, I need only just mention the holy Scriptures. To make them our constant companions

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is a duty of which no sincere Christian can possibly doubt.

After these there are Books, either of religion and morality, or of useful knowledge, or of innocent and rational entertainment. They who have not skill to make a proper choice of them, should consult those who can give them information. This is one of the advantages arising from civil society, that there are always persons to be found who will not refuse to advise the unskilful in these and in other points.

On the contrary, the books to be shunned are, first, the Atheistical, Deistical, irreligious, and profane ; which are indeed only fit for the examination of those who have learning, capacity, and inclination to confute them, or who are in no danger of receiving ill impressions from them. They who have not judgment and knowledge enough for these purposes, ought to avoid the perusal of them, lest they should be perplexed, ensnared, and seduced ; which hath been the unhappy case of many persons. In vain do we pray to God, not to lead us into temptation, if we lead ourselves into it.

The next class of bad authors, who are far more pernicious than the former, because they accom-

accommodate themselves to all capacities; which the others seldom do, are the dissolute and the debauched, who having lost all sense of decency and virtue, employ their abilities, such as they are, to poison the minds and enflame the passions of others. Such writers being past all grace and shame are much fitter to receive correction from the Civil Magistrate, than admonition from others; and it would be well for Society, if such writings were effectually suppressed and destroyed. But as this is rather to be wished than to be expected, it is the clear and indispensable duty of Christians to abhor such detestable performances, and never to give them a perusal.

Another set of writers, who in a different way are no less dangerous than the former, are the Fanatical and Enthusiastical, who ought to be avoided by those that are willing to preserve the peace of their mind, and the right use of their reason, unless they be wise and learned enough to see through the ignorance, emptiness, craziness, and folly of such flimsy performances. Enthusiasts have usually a melancholy disposition, an heated imagination, and a total want of judgment; and their writings are calculated to affect those readers, who
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with a sober and serious turn of mind, have the same strength of fancy, and the same weakness of intellects.

Amongst these writers, who are fanatics in reality, some are always to be found who are so in appearance only, who are mere hypocrites, and put a godly outside upon a knavish inside. The writings of the former and of the latter are equally pernicious.

What we have said of bad books holds true in the same manner of bad men, whose acquaintance should be carefully avoided.

And now I proceed to the duty recommended to us in the text, to chuse wise persons for our friends and acquaintances, and to lose no opportunity of receiving their advice and instruction.

But here some exceptions and limitations are to be made to this general rule. We can only follow it as far as we are able, as far as times and circumstances permit.

Providence may appoint a good man's station amongst sinners, either for a trial of his integrity, or to give him opportunity to use his best endeavours to reclaim them. This was the

* Some of the following remarks are taken from a Discourse of Abernethy.

case of Noah, and this was the case of Lot. It was no fault in these and in some other excellent persons that they did not walk with wise men, when no wise men were to be found. They did their office and duty by representing to the wicked their folly and their approaching destruction, and though they could not save them, they saved themselves, and their own small families, by their wisdom.

Thus our Saviour himself conversed with persons unlike himself, he who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; and thus his Apostles laboured incessantly in the instruction and conversion of an ignorant and debauched world, and instead of being themselves infected with the folly and vice of those with whom they had intercourse, they were the happy instruments of making many of them wise, and turning them from sin to righteousness. They who are well, says our Lord, justifying his own condescending behaviour, they who are well need not the physician, but they who are sick.

But besides the noble design to attempt by counsel and example to reclaim sinners, a design which the Scriptures are so far from disallowing, that they earnestly recommend it,

besides this, the state of human affairs requires that on various occasions we associate with persons of all characters. Civil communities, so absolutely necessary for mankind, are composed of good and bad, in such a variety of degrees, that there are few good without some bad qualities, and few bad without some good ones. Both are necessary for the purposes of order, government, commerce, and mutual help, though it be certain that the wise are the most useful members of the state, in proportion to their wisdom and virtue.

Indeed in the nearer and the domestic relations, it is the unhappy lot of many, not to be free from the company of fools. The prudent, the good-natured, and the virtuous are not seldom connected with the indiscreet, the forward, and the vicious. And in these cases, it is not our duty to break asunder the bonds of blood or of affinity, and violently to separate ourselves from our own family. On the contrary, instruction, patience, meekness, and compassion is our bounden duty towards them. The Apostle, it is true, adviseth Christians to avoid the company of those who calling themselves brethren in the faith, and believers, behaved like Pagans, and worse than Pagans. The
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meaning of which advice is, that we should contract no intimacies and hold no communication with them, when nothing requires it, and no good purpose can be served by it. But as to the common offices of humanity and charity, and as to civil intercourse in the affairs of life, we must have dealings with persons of all characters; else, says the same Apostle, we must needs go out of the world. Therefore the precept, To walk with the wise, is voluntarily to associate, and of deliberate choice to enter into intimacies and friendship with them.

Men are disposed to seek society, and to form acquaintances, larger or lesser, for their worldly concerns, and for their mutual satisfaction and entertainment. Persons of all capacities and conditions shew a desire of conversation, though of very different kinds, according to the diversity of tastes, occasioned by natural or acquired abilities, education, prevailing affections, temporal or religious views, situation, and circumstances. There are none of the lowest station and of the lowest understanding, who do not incline to company of some sort or other; there are none of the most solitary, retired, studious, and contemplative disposition, who do not at certain times stand in need of conversation,
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both for improvement and relaxation; there are none, howsoever proud, conceited, and self-sufficient, who are not driven by the same propensity to descend from their heights of arrogance and vanity, and to enter into a condescending and easy communication with others, and who find not themselves necessitated to be outwardly courteous even to those whom they inwardly despise.

This general inclination, or instinct, as we may call it, operates freely and variously, and for the most part it induces men to seek those who are of a like character and disposition with themselves. The sensual and voluptuous, the gay and polite, the curious and inquisitive, the men of taste for arts and sciences, the men of business, the men of rank and quality, the learned and studious, seek out one another, and take a pleasure in conversing together.

They therefore who love and value wisdom will seek the company and intimacy of the wise, for their benefit and moral improvement; which should be the end and design of such connections.

Indeed you shall find men who have the character of being good and wise; and yet depart somewhat from it, especially in conversation.

fation, and will discourse, never indeed viciously, but often as triflingly, and as little to the purpose as the weakest of mankind. But so far they do not walk as wise men, but as foolish men. And yet it must be allowed that the strictest wisdom and virtue may admit some conversation with some people about indifferent and even insignificant subjects, and much more about worldly affairs.

But the text chiefly implies that wisdom and virtue should be the principal object and the main design of mens social connections; and that in our voluntary associations, even for the purposes of this life, our choice should be determined with a regard to virtue, and such persons taken into our company as are wise, as far as natural ties and unavoidable circumstances will allow. Solomon himself, who is our instructor in this point, seems to have been one of those who could give good advice better than follow it; and by his own domestic connections and affinities was drawn away from the paths of wisdom to those of folly. His royal father was wiser than he, if he kept constantly to the prudent resolution which he made in one of his Psalms; A froward heart shall depart from me; I will not know a wicked person: mine eyes

eyes shall be upon the Faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me.

Thus far I have endeavoured to shew what it is to walk with wise men.

III. I shall now, secondly, consider the influence and efficacy which such conduct hath towards the attainment of wisdom.

Conversation hath a considerable share in forming the tempers and manners of men. Their behaviour, their speech, their sentiments, their likings, their aversions, their taste, depend much on the company which they keep; their moral and religious dispositions are frequently formed by it. I say not that this is the necessary and universal effect of such associations. Some are so obstinately and inflexibly wicked, as to defeat the efficacy of the best conversation and example, as well as all other means of reforming them; and some illustrious instances there are of virtuous tempers resisting the strongest temptations, and maintaining an unspotted innocence amidst the infection of the vilest company, and the prevalent corruption of the worst of times and places. But generally speaking, it is not so; and that sufficeth for our present purpose, which is to shew that to walk with the wise is the way to obtain

wisdom, and to walk with the wicked is to tread the paths that lead to destruction.

The remarkable influence which the behaviour and discourse of others hath upon us, may be ascribed to two causes; first, to a desire of being agreeable to those with whom we are familiar; and secondly, to the force of example.

Many things we do continually, to please others, and to gain or keep their good will and esteem. This desire operates strongly upon us, even when we do not discern it. In the modes of living, and the outward deportment, which take up so much of our thoughts and time, the principal view seems to be a conformity to custom or fashion, to which indeed we are apt to pay too much deference.

The desire of being esteemed is planted in human nature for excellent purposes, and if duly regulated, is very useful to direct and confirm us in the practice of all the social virtues. This desire of approbation ariseth much higher in serious and pious minds, and hath for its principal object the favour of Him who seeth all our ways, and knoweth all the secrets of our hearts. To have him habitually in view is what the Scriptures call, walking
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with God, and before God, and what they represent as the sublimest accomplishment of human nature. But as the same desire of being loved, honoured, and esteemed, leads us to recommend ourselves to men also, with whom we are conversant, and in whose neighbourhood or presence we dwell, their affections, conduct, and characters will have a considerable influence in forming ours, either for the better, or for the worse. The choice therefore which we make of our more intimate companions, to whose observation we lay ourselves the more open, as they also to ours, will contribute much to forming our inclinations, and influencing our behaviour.

And as to the effects of example, we all know how prone human nature is to imitation, how early it exerts itself, and anticipates reason and reflection, and how constantly it continues to operate in us; and therefore good examples are proposed to us in the Scriptures, as helps and inducements to the practice of religion. Let us consult experience, and we shall see the force of it in others, and feel it in ourselves. The things which were once indifferent to us, or from which we were averse, or which we imagined to be scarcely practicable, insensibly

excite in us a disposition to do them ourselves, when we often behold them done before our eyes. And as to virtue in particular, which in its own nature is attractive, virtuous examples first render it familiar to us, and then render it amiable, by setting it before us in a lively and affecting manner. A good picture, or a good statue, strikes the mind with greater force, and gives it a more lively idea of any object, than the most laboured and accurate description in words can produce. In like manner, to represent morality and piety by precepts doth not excite the affections so powerfully as to see it delineated and exemplified in life. This is clothing an invisible spirit in a visible form. The beauty indeed and the dignity of holiness, as described by good writers, particularly by the Sacred writers, strikes every thoughtful and serious mind, and powerfully excites its desires. But then in the present imperfection of human nature, and amidst the contest of contrary inclinations, and the assaults of temptations surrounding us on every side, there is one strong prejudice against Virtue held forth to us by description, that it seems very difficult to be practised. This prejudice is best removed by example. Example will convince us that it is

not a lovely phantom, a child of fancy and speculation, but that there is a reality in it, and that it is practicable in human life.

The example of God is constantly proposed to us in the Scriptures as the most unexceptionably worthy of our imitation. Be ye holy, says God, as I am holy. Be ye perfect, says our Lord, as your heavenly Father is perfect. But God being no object of our senses, and to be apprehended only by our understanding, the Scripture hath added to it, and hath recommended to us another object which is more familiar, and approaching nearer to our case, even Jesus Christ, the visible Image of the invisible God, shewing us an accomplished Virtue in an human form and nature, and the amiable and imitable qualities of industry, condescension, humility, meekness, patience, courage, resignation and charity under the greatest trials, and the heaviest sufferings. But here again there is a sort of plea and excuse for our falling so very short of so perfect a pattern, since we have many defects, many frailties, many irregular desires, many turbulent passions, from which the Son of God was free. To remove therefore all exceptions of this sort, and all pretences of inability to discharge our obligations, we

have the rules of morality and of righteousness reduced to practice in men who were nothing more than men. Though their example is far short of perfection, yet it is worthy of our emulation and imitation, and a sensible reproach of our failings. History sacred and secular shews us men naturally as weak as we are, liable to the same temptations of vanity, conceit, pride, sensual affections, fear, wrath, envy, and malice, yet conquering these foes to their salvation. They had as quick a sense of pleasure and pain, of love and aversion, of profit and loss, of plenty and poverty, of honour and dishonour as we; and yet they overcame the world by their faith, and by the influence of Christianity upon their minds. They had indeed the divine assistance to strengthen their infirmity; and so may we, if we seek it as they did.

It is likewise to be observed, that the nearer the example is, the more force it acquires. The distant report of Confessors and Martyrs, of lovers of their country, and friends to mankind, of men who did and suffered much either for the sake of religion, or for the benefit of Society; these examples recorded in history, being remote from us, affect us not so sensibly as the instances of piety and virtue, of courage
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and constancy, in our own times, and amongst our own acquaintances. The practice of good persons, with whom we are connected, either silently reprove us for our faults, or encourages us to well-doing; their lives as well as their instructions admonish us in a friendly and familiar manner to walk circumspectly and honourably, to be blameless and harmless amidst a perverse generation. On the other hand, the pernicious effect of walking with fools is no less manifest. Their evil discourses and their evil deeds persuade the careless and unattentive companions that virtue is only an empty shadow, for the sake of which the substantial enjoyments of sensuality are not to be given up. Many there are who by a good education and a good temper have at first honest sentiments and commendable inclinations, who start at evil actions, and are afraid to venture upon them, and yet seeing the corrupt practices of their associates, overcome these bashful fears, and at last get the impious courage to commit the vilest iniquity.

A few reflections may be added, which the subject suggests.

First; The wise and virtuous are a great blessing to the world, although they be often little esteemed and regarded by it. It is for their

sakes that Providence with much long-suffering spares the wicked with whom they are joined in society. It is by their behaviour that some religion and morality is kept up, and some check put to encroaching vice. When such persons are honoured, rewarded, and promoted, the good effects of it are felt through the whole community. But when the wicked are exalted and bear rule, the infection spreads apace, and ruin follows close behind it.

Secondly, The wicked are not only good for nothing, which would be bad enough, but mischievous beyond expression. He is a public nuisance, who by an open profligacy debauches as far as he can all who are within its influence. The more eminent his station is, the more pernicious he grows. His outward appearance dazzles the eyes of fools; but stripped of his false ornaments, he is a most despicable creature. This may be applied to those of lower rank, whose evil example operates in a smaller circle, in their own families, and their neighbourhood; who instead of making their children and their domestics useful to themselves and to others, perform the unnatural office of Tempters and Devils, to drive them headlong to perdition.

Lastly,

Lastly, We ought to be very careful in the choice of our companions. I was going to say, of our friends. But friendship, a thing much talked of, is so very seldom to be found in an eminent degree, that it is hardly worth while to give any directions about it. There is however a lower sort of friendship which is common enough, an intimacy between persons who have a just esteem and respect for each other, and an intercourse of free conversation, and of good offices. This sort of friendship, founded in wisdom and prudence, and mutually improved to rational, moral, and religious purposes, is a blessing much to be desired, and carefully to be preserved, and one of the truest pleasures that this world affords.

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choice of our companions. I was going to say
of our friends. But friendship, a thing much
talked of, is a very seldom to be found in an
Christian. It is a thing which is not to be
given, but it is to be received. It is a thing
which is not to be sought, but it is to be
found. It is a thing which is not to be
desired, but it is to be loved. It is a thing
which is not to be feared, but it is to be
trusted. It is a thing which is not to be
doubted, but it is to be believed. It is a
thing which is not to be questioned, but it
is to be accepted. It is a thing which is
not to be rejected, but it is to be embraced.
It is a thing which is not to be despised,
but it is to be valued. It is a thing which
is not to be scorned, but it is to be honored.
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S E R M O N XVII.

PROVERBS, i. 1, 2.

The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction.

THIS Book is intituled, * The Proverbs: but what we call proverbs, properly and strictly speaking, are of a different nature; and most of Solomon's proverbs are rather to be called Maxims, or Sentences. A proverb is a short moral sentence which means something else than what the words naturally and literally imply; that is to say, it must be expressed in a figurative manner. When Solomon says,

* Though this be not a large treatise, yet the same precepts are frequently repeated; which makes it probable that it is a compilation of the moral sayings of other wise men, besides those of Solomon.

Trust

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding, this is no proverb, but a moral sentence. When he says, Drink waters out of thine own cistern, this is a proverb, and it means, Be content with thine own property, and meddle not with that which belongs to another.

These Proverbs of Solomon are a collection of wise and moral sayings, usually plain and concise; they are also of the poetical kind, and fall into metre, and therefore were the more easily learned and remembered by those in whose language they were written. They have not that air of smartness, and vivacity, and wit, which modern writers have usually affected in their Maxims and Sentences; but they have what is better, truth and solid good sense.

No one subject is long pursued in this treatise of Solomon, nor is there any coherence and connection between its parts. The nature of this sort of writing doth not admit it. But though the composition be of the disjointed kind, yet there is a general design running through the whole, which the Author keeps always in view, and that is, to instruct the people, and particularly young people, at their entrance

entrance into public and active life, to give them an early dose and an earnest desire of real wisdom, and to lay down such clear rules for their behaviour, as shall carry them through the world with peace and credit.

There are two treatises of the same kind, amongst the apocryphal books in our Bible, which are of no sacred authority. One is Ecclesiastes, which contains many prudent and wise instructions. The other is the Wisdom of Solomon, written by one who falsely pretends to be Solomon, and speaks in his name; and so deserves the less regard, for assuming a character which belongs not to him.

As to the authority of the Book of Proverbs, you may observe that the Old Testament contains the Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalmists, and the Historians. But under none of these classes can Solomon properly be placed. He is the first author, that we know of, who may be called *A Moralist*; and as such he appears in the book of Proverbs, as also in his Ecclesiastes. He says nothing or very little concerning

As to his *Song*, many commentaries and discourses have been written upon it by the ancient Fathers, and by modern Divines, which have not made it one jot clearer than it was before. Their allegorical,

concerning the Law of Moses; he leaves the explaining or enforcing it to the Prophets, the Priests and the Levites. He says little about revealed religion, but rather confines himself to natural religion, or morality. He hath no claim that we can see to the title of a Prophet; he discourses not in their style and manner; he says not, The word of the Lord came to me, and, Thus saith the Lord; he foretold no future events, and he wrought no miracles. He delivers no precepts, but such as a wise man might discern by the strength of his own reason.

But as we find in Scripture that God had endowed him with uncommon natural abilities, and with singular advantages and opportunities to improve them, and had also promised to bestow wisdom upon him, it is reasonable to suppose that in the works which he composed for the perpetual use of God's people, the divine spirit so far assisted him as though not to reveal or suggest any thing to him, yet to guard

allegorical, mystical, and spiritual interpretations are arbitrary, unsupported, and the mere effusions of a fertile imagination. It is a short and elegant Poem, in which the name of God is not once mentioned, in which not one religious or moral duty is recommended, and which is never cited by our Saviour, or by any Writer of the New Testament.

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and prevent him from delivering any false notions of morality and religion.

This sufficeth to establish his authority as a sacred writer, and this Book of his was ever held in high esteem by the Jews, and admitted into their Canon of the Scriptures. There are also some allusions to it in the New Testament which conduce to recommend and confirm it. It is indeed a book which will stand the test of the severest inquiry, and you shall not find any precept in it against which any just objection can be offered.

Solomon in wisdom and knowledge surpassed all his contemporaries; he was a Poet, a natural and experimental philosopher, and a political and moral philosopher.

If it be asked whether Solomon, the great and wise Solomon, practised himself all the excellent rules which he gave to his people, the answer must be, that he did not. He violated

His father David is called the man after God's own heart, not so much, I should think, for his personal, as for his princely virtues, for his zeal to establish and preserve the worship of God, and to suffer no idolatrous practices and pagan superstitions to be allowed in his dominions. Consider David as King over a people, to whom God had promised prosperity if they obeyed him, and threatened punishments if they forsook him; and in that point of view he appears

violated the laws of Moses, and perhaps in other points, so particularly in taking Pagan and idolatrous wives and concubines. The number of whom also was highly scandalous and immoral. And when he grew old, these women seduced him so far as to persuade him to set up the worship of the idol gods in his dominions. But he acted in all probability to indulge and humour those odorous, against his own judgment; for if he had himself worshipped their idols, he must have lost, and have lost all common sense.

For these transgressions God punished him, and raised him up enemies to afflict him at the latter end of his reign; and when he died, he left behind him a discontented people, and a foolish son and successor, who soon lost more than half of the kingdom.

One would think it impossible that Solomon could ever have committed such errors and

appears to great advantage, and was an excellent ruler. During his reign the nation was successful and victorious, great and powerful. But afterwards, when the succeeding kings of Israel and Judah, idolatry came in, and drew after it every disaster and calamity. Josephus is of opinion that his making the brazen oxen in the temple, and the lions for his throne, were a transgression of the law.

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such crimes. He had received his crown directly from the hand of God, who had preferred him, though a younger son, and had set aside his elder brother; he had been favoured with divine revelations; he had been appointed to build a magnificent temple for the service of God; he had received promises of wisdom, knowledge, wealth, glory, peace, power, prosperity, and every temporal blessing, and these promises had been signally accomplished. How could such a Prince shut his eyes against such evidence! How could he be guilty of such monstrous forgetfulness and ingratitude! Why indeed it is often seen that the follies of men of uncommon parts and penetration are worse than those of men of mean abilities and low capacities; as if such geniuses were doomed to surpass other people both ways; and Solomon stands a most memorable example of great accomplishments and great frailties, and of the dangerous effects of too much power and prosperity.

But as he had been once so highly in the favour of God, one would willingly suppose that the holy Spirit did not entirely and finally forsake him, and that he returned to his duty; according to the Jewish tradition, that he

lived to be sensible of his faults, and in his^f old days wrote his Ecclesiastes, to testify his repentance, and to warn others that all is vanity and vexation of spirit, except the fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments.

Hence we may observe that the brightest accomplishments of the mind, and even the extraordinary gifts of the holy Spirit, are no sure tokens of a man's virtue. It is true that usually, under the Law, the Prophets, and inspired teachers of God's people were men of probity and piety; which indeed was necessary to give the more weight and regard to their precepts, and to secure to them the veneration of the public. Yet the divine Spirit might fall upon less worthy men, and of an exceptionable character, and they might be employed in such sacred offices. Likewise under the Gospel, the disciples of Christ were sincere and honest men, qualifications which indeed were necessary for the advancement of reli-

^f The Scripture says that Solomon came young to the throne, and reigned forty years; so that he must have died at about sixty. Josephus says that he reigned eighty years, and died at the age of ninety-four. Of these two computations the first seems to be too short, and the second too long.

gion; yet we know, one traitor and apostate was admitted among them, and had the same miraculous powers for a time; and afterwards, in the primitive Church, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were conferred sometimes upon some who did not make the best use of them, and were not themselves the wiser for them. For which reason St. Paul prefers by far the moral virtues and the Christian graces in general, and charity or benevolence in particular, to all natural or preternatural gifts, as more valuable to the possessor, and placing him much higher in the favour of God.

If therefore at any time the word of God be dispensed to us by persons whose lives are not suitable to their function, our Saviour hath given us a direction for all such cases. The Scribes and Pharisees, says he, sit in the seat of Moses, and are your publicly appointed teachers. What therefore they bid you observe, agreeably to the Law and the Prophets, that observe and do; but do not after their works; for they say and do not.

As to Solomon, his faults, whatsoever they were, were to himself; they may be a warning to us, to avoid them, and they cannot hurt us if we do not imitate them; his pre-

cepts and maxims are preserved by divine Providence, for the benefit of Christians, and the good of the Church in all ages.

Let us then, at certain times, bestow a careful perusal upon this Book of Proverbs. It is short and soon read over. It will perhaps be slighted on account of its contents, as a mere system of dry Morality, by those who had rather deal in discourses of the mystic and enthusiastic kind, and admire that sort of rapturous and extatic devotion. But whether they will allow it or no, this Book contains the main parts of pure and undefiled religion, and lays down the best of rules for the prudent conduct of life, and for obtaining the favour of God and the testimony of an approving conscience.

Solomon, to give the more weight and dignity to his precepts, delivers them, not as his own, but as those of Wisdom herself, and in the Poetic and Dramatic way introduces her as a Divine Person, the favourite offspring and first-born of God, who dwelt with him before the foundation of heaven and earth, before time and the world, and who is sent forth from him to guide and instruct the children of men.

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By the wisdom which Solomon exhorts us to acquire, he means true religion and virtue, as by folly he means disobedience and vice. I shall therefore proceed to lay before you a short and general abstract of the acts of religion and morality recommended by him, and I shall divide them into positive and negative duties, what he bids and what he forbids: and then I will consider the motives by which he enforces his precepts.

He then lays the foundation of religion upon the principle of fearing God. The fear of the Lord, says he, is the beginning of wisdom: the fear of the Lord, that is, a pious reverence of the supreme Being, and a disposition to conform our will to his, and a dread of offending him and incurring his displeasure. Solomon represents our duty to God rather as the fear of God than as the love of God, which latter expression he never uses. But though love be confessedly the sublimer principle of action, yet fear with the bulk of mankind is the more effectual incitement to obedience; and when it hath once produced its proper effect, it will infallibly introduce, together with hope and with reliance, the

love of God, of him who is the Best and the Greatest.

He exhorts us to love Wisdom and to prize it above all things, as the only way and the infallible way to obtain it. And this rule holds true in every useful acquisition. No one ever remarkably and eminently excelled in any art or science, or in any branch of knowledge, who had not a sort of predominant passion and enthusiastic fondness for it. A man may pursue some studies with a view to profit, or to honour and reputation ; but these motives, strong as they are, will not carry him far, unless he loves the occupation for its own sake, and would even prefer it to profit and honour. The same temper is requisite in moral and religious improvements, which are never very considerable, unless the bent of the affections is wholly turned that way.

He exhorts us also to love wisdom betimes, and to make it the first choice, the first object of our affections. I love them that love me, says Wisdom, and they that seek me early shall find me. This also holds true in every useful acquisition. Youth is the time when the foundation of knowledge either secular or religious

ligious is to be laid, and they who begin any useful study late in life seldom become great proficient. It is observable that when such persons set up for scholars, they are perpetually making blunders, for want of the rudiments of erudition.

Solomon exhorts young persons to honour and obey their parents and regard their instructions. My son, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother. He requires also of parents that they should be careful in the education of their children. He advises to be discreet also in the choice of friends and acquaintances, and to keep good company. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise. He exhorts to chastity and purity, and to be content with such pleasures as are lawful, to be of a quiet and peaceable temper, to be gentle meek and humble, to be liberal and charitable, to shew mercy not only to our fellow-creatures, but even to the brutes, to be very active and industrious, and ever busy in some honest occupation, to have our passions under government, to be discreet and sparing in our speech, to be strictly honest in trade, in buying and selling, to speak the truth, to be patient of just reproof,

and ever ready to hear and to follow wise counsel; to have the public welfare in view and at heart, and to be useful members of society, to be patient under afflictions, and to account them fatherly corrections intended for our benefit, to trust in God, to be obedient subjects to civil government, to be long-suffering and ready to forgive injuries, to return good for evil, and to do charitable offices to our enemies; and when we have performed all this, to acknowledge ourselves what we are at best, frail and imperfect creatures.

Thus much for the duties required; now let us survey the negative precepts, or the offences which are to be shunned.

He dissuades from fornication and adultery, and upon this subject he is very copious, these being probably reigning vices in his times, as indeed they are in all times. He amply sets forth the folly, the danger, the wickedness, and the pernicious consequences of such a behaviour, of frequenting the company of harlots and adulteresses. He calls them strange women, that is, foreigners; for the understanding of which expression you are to observe that as by the Law of Moses, no Israelitish woman was permitted to profess the trade
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of an harlot, the practice was chiefly and more openly carried on by women who came from neighbouring and pagan nations; and these being of another religion, if they were of any religion, would probably seduce those who frequented them into the additional and heinous crime of idolatry, as Solomon afterwards knew by his own woful experience.

He dissuades from sloth and idleness; and upon this topic he is also copious; for being himself of a most inquisitive, studious, and active temper, he seems to have had a particular abhorrence for the sluggard, whom he sets forth in all his rags and misery, a creature hated of God and despised by men, and whom he ridicules with great vivacity, and censures with much vehemence.

He exhorts to avoid the pernicious company of sinners, to shun strife and contention, sedition and rebellion, to keep the heart free from irregular passions, from pride, conceit, envy, rapaciousness, covetousness, anger, contempt of others; not to be liars, gluttons, drunkards, slanderers, tale-bearers, false witnesses, overcredulous, takers and givers of bribes to pervert judgment, partial, and respecters of persons, talkative and vain boasters; never to oppress

press any, especially not the poor and helpless, whose cause God will take in hand, and revenge the injuries done to them.

He exhorts to avoid suretyship as a most dangerous indiscretion; by which I suppose he means that we should never be bound in behalf of another for more than we can afford to lose without any considerable detriment to our fortunes and families.

He teacheth us not to trust in riches, in friends, in superior abilities, nor to value ourselves for our oblations and sacrifices, for any of the externals or ceremonials of religion; but to account works of righteousness to be by far the more important parts of our duty.

Lastly; he earnestly exhorts us not to be scoffers and scorers of religion. Such persons he considers as the worst sort of sinners, as incurable fools and reprobates. The scorer, if he is in a mean and poor condition, doth all the mischief that he can perform in his narrow sphere of action; if he is in an exalted station, he is a public curse, and a national calamity. The scorer hateth admonition, and hateth and injureth the friendly and charitable man who giveth it. Therefore Solomon adviseth us to have nothing to say to such a man,
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and nothing to do with him. And our Saviour, in like manner, warns his disciples, in prudence to avoid persons of this character, and not to throw away instruction upon them; not to give holy things to dogs, nor to cast pearls before swine. For thus it is; The man who sins, and owns himself a sinner, who hath lucid intervals, in which he is sorry for his follies, who purposes to amend some time or other, who honours that virtue and piety which he doth not practise, such an one is not past recovery, there is in his breast a vital spark, which though feeble and dim may be kindled into a spiritual life; but when he proceeds to add impudence to vice, and pride to ignorance, and to fancy himself full of wit, of wisdom, and of penetration, and to shew his parts, such as they are, in ridiculing morality and making a jest of his Maker and of religion, he is dead in trespasses and sins, and one might as well preach to the grave, as to him.

I have now given you an abstract of Solomon's maxims and sentences, which contain a good moral system, and the main parts of our duty to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. This is the Religion of Nature; this is the Religion of Moses and the Prophets, only
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the ceremonial Law was added to it; this is lastly the Religion of the New Testament, only faith in Christ, and a belief of his doctrines, and an open profession of his Gospel, and the two sacraments are added in the Christian dispensation.

Let us then consider the motives by which Solomon in this Book of Proverbs enforces these moral duties, and the recompences which he, in the name of divine Wisdom, promiseth to those who practise them. And they are no less than every advantage that a man can reasonably desire in this life; they are the favour of God and his protection, and along with it, the testimony of a good conscience, courage and confidence, safety from evil, long life, health, plenty, riches, honours, reputation both present and posthumous, and an inheritance that shall descend to childrens children. As Solomon promises these blessings to the righteous, so he threatens finners with all the opposite evils and calamities.

But here we must pause, and ask, Are these things so? and were they ever so?

Here are ample promises indeed, but they relate to the present life, and seem confined to it. So that if the performance ever fall short
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of the promises, if these privileges were not constantly bestowed upon the wise and upright, we are forced, though unwillingly, to conclude that although the duties which Solomon recommended were indeed decent and amiable and laudable, yet the motives by which he enforced them were weak and fallacious.

Some will tell you that under the Jewish dispensation, whilst God was the immediate King and Governor of that nation, temporal rewards and punishments were distributed equally and exactly to individuals, according to their behaviour. But the history of the Old Testament, short as it is, contains enough to disprove this notion; and indeed the constitution of things proclaims its impossibility, and shews that this world was never intended for a state of exact retribution. Never was there such a state of things from the infancy of the world; from the day when Cain slew his righteous brother, down to the present time.

The case seems to be this; Whilst God acted as the King of Israel, he by an extraordinary providence dispensed temporal rewards and punishments to that people in a national man-

§ Fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine campi.

ner;

ner; and as the prosperity or adversity of individuals depends much upon the state of the public, they were more frequently recompensed or corrected in this life than any other people; but yet not without some exceptions. Therefore all the promises of worldly felicity made to the righteous in the Books of the Old Testament must needs have been understood by wise and good men as usually but not invariably bestowed. And Solomon himself sometimes supposeth that a man may be poor and neglected of men, and yet honest, and in the favour of God.

These exceptions to God's equal providence were so many indications of another life; and it was most reasonable to conclude that when God permitted his best servants to be here in a suffering state, he would make it up to them hereafter.

For the most part indeed and generally speaking, it is true, and it will justify Solomon's observations, that piety or virtue produceth many present advantages, by its own natural tendency, and by the fixed laws of causes and effects; and that it secures from many evils which a flagitious behaviour fails
not

not to produce. So that at all times, and under all dispensations, there are not wanting motives even of the temporal kind to call rational creatures to the practice of their duty. In the New Testament also these motives are sometimes mentioned, as it is fit they should. But as a future state is there more clearly discovered, that is used as the principal inducement. The doctrine of the Gospel is this; If thou doest these things, happy art thou; for though the world cannot or will not recompense thee, thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

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S E R M O N XVIII.

PROVERBS XV. 14.

*The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh
knowledge.*

THE desire of knowledge is in some sense natural to us all; and it is the duty of us all to cherish that desire, to direct it to proper objects, and to keep it within due bounds. These three points shall be the subject of the following discourse.

Knowledge is necessary for us, not only to manage the affairs of this life, but also to perform the service of our Maker. Conscience may dictate to us that things are right or wrong, decent or indecent; and conscience may be mistaken in her decisions, unless she call in reason to her assistance; for a clear knowledge of morality cannot be obtained without serious

consideration, and the exercise of our intellectual faculties; nor can the revealed will of God be understood without application of mind.

We at first receive the knowledge of things by perception, and then improve it by reflection. So that to get wisdom, and make ourselves masters of useful sciences, much thought, industry, and study are required. Our memory also seldom faithfully retains the first impressions, except they be repeated; so that recollection and practice and habit are necessary to render us expert. Since then knowledge is so expedient for us, and cannot be acquired without labour, it was proper that we should have such a desire of it as would excite us to search for it, and make the pursuit of it the more entertaining. In other cases, we see that men have strong propensities after those things which they account necessary to their support, and which they would else be disposed to neglect, because of the trouble and fatigue which usually attends the acquisition and preservation of them.

This general desire of knowledge is manifested very soon. We see how early curiosity exerts itself in healthy and lively children, how they gaze at every new object, and reach at any

any thing that is near, how apt they are to ask questions, and to enquire the names and natures of things. This inclination grows up with us, and no one can be contented to be wholly ignorant, but is for gratifying one way or other the inherent propensity. It must indeed be owned that some persons seem to have very little of this desire; but it is not from them that we are to make an estimate of mankind; as we must not conclude that man is not a rational creature, because some make little or no use of their reason. Such indolence is very often rather a fault of their will than a defect in their nature; and we do not say that this appetite is equally strong in all men, any more than the other inclinations. The good of civil society, which requires that there should be men of low as well as of high rank, seems also to require an unequal distribution of the temper and abilities of the mind. It is meet that there should be men of smaller as well as of larger capacities, that they may be fitted for different ways of life; and this also makes it expedient that there should be various degrees of this propensity towards knowledge. But as all have need of some measure of knowledge, we may conclude that they usually have the desire of it in some degree.

gree. There have in all times been some, who have taken extraordinary pains to improve their understanding. They have despised riches, and renounced honours, and abstained from pleasures, and in silent retirement from the busy world, have sought after truth with clear and undisturbed minds. They have endured hardships, and have travelled by sea and by land, to learn the laws, the manners, the religions, and the sciences of other nations. They have neglected both rest and food, to study the liberal arts, and to search into nature. Such have been their unquenchable thirst of knowledge. Those illustrious persons, in very ancient times, to whose labours the world is so much indebted, seem to have been raised by Providence for the benefit of mankind. Like the sun in his progress through the heavens, they brought their light from the eastern countries, and with it illuminated these western parts; and by their learned industry the understandings of men were refined, and their lives were civilized, and so the world was in some measure prepared for the reception of the Gospel, as judicious persons have conjectured.

Knowledge then is a very desirable acquisition. The pleasure of any creature consists in

having objects suitable to its faculties. Knowledge therefore must be agreeable to an intelligent being, and as pleasant to the intellectual part, as is a fine prospect to the eye, or harmonious sounds to the ear. Many there are who spend much time and pains in very useless speculations and unprofitable studies, and in so doing find amusement and satisfaction, from a false taste and a want of judgment. Yet even these seek and find a sort of knowledge; for novelty is knowledge, or something like it. But far superior is the pleasure of those who have applied themselves to the disquisition of nobler subjects, and of sublimer truths. We read of contemplative persons, who having found out the solution of difficult problems which had long perplexed them, were so overcome with joy, that they seemed to be beside themselves. When new scenes of truth open upon the eye of the understanding, an agreeable admiration is excited, and is the greater for the present, when any considerable point of knowledge accidentally offers itself, which lay concealed before. We have pleasure when we find what we sought; and still more when we find it unexpectedly, and without previous pains, for we love knowledge more than we

love labour; knowledge we love for its own sake, and labour only for the sake of that knowledge which it produces.

The holy Scriptures bear witness to this, as it may be concluded from those figures of speech by which ignorance and knowledge are there represented to us. Ignorance is styled darkness, which is disagreeable; and Truth is called light, which it is pleasant to behold. Our Saviour supposes the knowledge of his doctrines and of his promises to be matter of great exultation to well-disposed minds. The kingdom of heaven, says he, is like unto a treasure hid in a field, which a man having found, he hideth it, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. It must have been a great joy indeed, which induced those who first embraced the Gospel, so cheerfully to renounce all the advantages, and endure all the evils of this life, for the glorious prospect of a blessed immortality. They were like men who are brought out of a dark prison into daylight and liberty all on a sudden.

Our subject may be farther illustrated by considering that this will be no small part of the satisfaction which the good will enjoy in a

future and a better state. Their understandings will then be enlarged, and will take in knowledge with more facility. They will be freed from all causes of error, as well as from all temptations to evil, and in a clear light will contemplate many excellent truths, of which at present they discern little or nothing. If this improvement be represented to us in the Scriptures as a blessing and a reward, it is evident that the knowledge, to which the good can attain here below, is proportionally agreeable and valuable, and fully repays the labour of acquiring it.

There is an objection to all this from the words of Solomon himself, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, where he seems to contradict what he asserts in the text concerning that laudable desire of knowledge, which is always to be found in well-disposed minds. He says there in a melancholy and desponding mood, In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow. If this be the case, a man cannot do better than to sit down contented in an humble and quiet ignorance, which is worth all the liberal arts put together. Such kind of proverbial sentences,

and general affirmations are capable of different senses, and liable to many limitations.

Solomon in his Ecclesiastes describes the conduct of a person who seeks for satisfaction in the enjoyments of this world, and observes that he who doth this will assuredly be disappointed; for these things were not designed to be the supreme happiness of man. We have eager cravings after complete felicity, which can never be satisfied by earthly objects. They are all too uncertain, and too imperfect to give us full contentment. He that seeks it in them will find much vanity and vexation, will have cause to repent of his choice, and will look back upon his vain attempts with dissatisfaction. The pleasures of this world are like the sensitive plant; they look fair and flourishing at a distance; but when we come to touch them, they shrink and wither away. So then according to Solomon, the pleasures of the senses, and the abundance of worldly possessions, and this kind of experimental knowledge, will not make a man happy.

But there is a wisdom and a knowledge, relating, not directly to morality and religion, yet to objects innocent and useful, which is properly called learning, or skill, relating to the liberal

liberal arts and sciences, to the affairs of this world, and to all that it offers to our observation; and here Solomon's remark may in a certain sense be applied, In much of this wisdom there is much grief, and he that increaseth this knowledge, increaseth sorrow. For valuable and entertaining, and profitable as it is, it may be attended with some inconveniences, and produce uneasiness and vexation, partly through our own fault, and partly through the fault of others. For he who excels in this knowledge is sometimes disposed to esteem himself too much on that account, and to slight others, and to grow morose, contentious and overbearing, and to be vexed at the ignorance, folly, and misconduct of his fellow citizens. And though his superior knowledge should be adorned with humility, patience, and good-nature, yet it exposes him to the envy, the calumny, and the malice of those who are insolent, proud, and knavish, and who usually have the most power in their hands, though not the most knowledge in their heads.

But it ought not hence to be inferred that there is not an advantage and a delight, even in secular knowledge wisely pursued and soberly used; and much less that the contemplation
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of God's works, and the study of his will, do not afford a serious and a lasting pleasure. Solomon's discourse therefore about the vanity of this world is closed with this religious maxim; Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man; this is his main duty and interest, this is his pleasure and his happiness.

I now proceed to observe that our natural desire of knowledge may be misused, as well as the other inclinations and passions of the human mind. It may be too little; it may be too great; it may be applied to wrong objects.

Some persons do not desire knowledge so much as they ought. They neglect this natural propensity, and suffer it to be in a manner extinguished; which certainly is a great misbehaviour: for God doth not put passions in our minds, to be extirpated, but to be improved, and hath not endued us with understanding for no purpose. We should have some employment for our faculties, as well as for our hands and feet, and we must not let our thoughts run to waste, any more than our time. It becomes us, as rational agents, to acquire knowledge in general, religious knowledge in particular. And yet how many are there who
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neglect the means of obtaining the latter? They will not attend to the voice of their own conscience, nor let the light of divine revelation shine upon them, but shut it out by their follies and vices. Their lives testify that they neither know how to govern their appetites, nor how to regulate their conduct. This ignorant negligence of religion may proceed from too warm a pursuit of other things. But what will this world avail us, if we are excluded from an inheritance in the next? It may proceed from mere sloth. But the unprofitable servant, who suffers his talents to lie useless, is to be cast into utter darkness. The Scriptures therefore exhort us, not to be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is; and not to be unactive, but to do the work of him that sent us, whilst it is day, and before the night cometh when none can work. The wise and industrious Solomon admonisheth us to seek for wisdom as for silver, and to search for her, as for hidden treasure. The Bereans, who neither rejected the Gospel, nor received it hastily and upon trust, but honestly enquired into the evidences of it, are commended by St. Luke as men of the best spirit, and the noblest temper. It is an argument of consummate wickedness

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to say to the Almighty, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Not that all sinners will thus defy God with their lips; but thus their behaviour speaketh for them, when they reject and despise instruction. It is a shame for young persons, and far more for those who are advanced in years, not to have taken the first step to a religious life, either in knowledge or in practice.

Another abuse of the love of knowledge is to mind things less considerable more than those of greater moment. Thus amongst persons of a liberal education, you shall see some spending their time in a laborious study of words, neglecting the more useful study of things; and yet the knowledge of words is chiefly valuable as it is an help to the understanding of things. But indeed, to be skilled in the art of governing the passions, and in the plain rules of holy living, is preferable to all kind of erudition. Without much learning we may be wise and happy; but we cannot be so, without knowing and performing our duty. Though a man were ever so well versed in other arts and sciences; though he knew the virtues, properties, and uses of every thing that the earth contains; though he could unfold all
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the laws of matter and motion; what will it profit him hereafter, if he doth not understand the word of God, as well as the book of Nature, and doth not serve that Supreme Cause, whose works he contemplates? It is mere vanity and folly to be able to describe the way of the heavenly bodies, and not to know the way to heaven; or, which is much more common, to be expert in the means of getting an estate, which must be left in a short time, and to lay up no treasure in the everlasting kingdom of God.

In the Scriptures themselves, all things are not of the same importance. Some places are so obscure, that they seem to be left for the exercise of our humility, or for the discovery of future ages. The plain precepts and promises of religion should be our principal study, the former being the rule of our conduct, and the latter the support and comfort of our mind. David never speaks of his delighting in abstruse and difficult questions, but expresses himself very feelingly concerning the pleasure and benefit which he found in contemplating the commandments of God. By them, says he, is thy servant taught, and in keeping of them there is great reward. St. Paul exhorts the
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Corinthians not to value themselves upon gifts, natural or supernatural, but to prefer to them all the exercise of Christian Charity. He advises also to avoid foolish questions, and disputes which gender strife, which instead of sweetning the temper, irritate the angry passions; and rather to follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace.

Yet the things which are of lesser consequence are not wholly forbidden, provided too much time be not spent in them, and they do not usurp the place of better occupations.

Some things there are which we ought not to know; and a vain curiosity after them constitutes another abuse of our natural desire of knowledge. This curiosity brought on the fall of our first parents, and still reigns amongst their posterity. God hath commanded us to keep aloof from the pleasures of sin; but we long to taste of those forbidden fruits, though in such cases to be ignorant is both an advantage and a virtue, and to know is both a misfortune and a crime. Sin should only be known, as the rocks at sea, that it may be avoided.

There is another sort of forbidden curiosity, that of busy-bodies and tale-bearers, who meddle

meddle with other people's affairs, and pry into the secrets of families, and decide about public or private concerns, without sufficient information, or proper qualifications; the genuine consequence of which is impertinence, censoriousness, false judgment, and malice mixed with mistakes.

They also are inexcusable, who in speculative points of religion rashly and proudly dogmatize about things which they cannot comprehend. It is reasonable to hope that God will make great allowances for the errors of good men; but it is no less reasonable to think that he will be highly displeased with those who decide presumptuously about unrevealed points, and uncharitably condemn and oppress those who will not submit to their bold determinations.

It becomes us also to be contented with such a knowledge of the Divine Nature, and the divine administration, as we are capable of acquiring, and to remember that when Moses desired to see the glory of God, he was not favoured with the full sight, but was only suffered to behold such manifestations of it as were not too bright for mortal eyes.

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Our understanding is confined within small bounds, and Reason and Scripture tell us that no man by searching can find out the Almighty to perfection. His perfection lies in his incomprehensibility. If he could be fully understood by his creatures, he would not be infinite. He can also effect his designs by ways which we cannot trace, and hath attributes too large for our narrow conceptions. What is necessary for us to know concerning him is clear both from his works and from his word. But where his works and his word are silent, we should be so too. We know not the nature even of those substances which are exposed to our senses, and can only discern their outward qualities; much less can we comprehend the invisible essence of the Almighty. Even the Angels who excell us in wisdom, as much as in rank and dignity, and good men who have left this cloudy world, and see things in a purer light, are far from having an adequate knowledge of their Creator.

As we cannot define the nature or essence of God, so neither can we possibly have any certain knowledge of future events, any farther than God hath thought fit to reveal them. This foreknowledge God frequently claims

as a perfection belonging to himself alone. And this one plain argument taken from the word of God should satisfy and convince us that all the ways of divination and fortune-telling are vain, deceitful and unlawful. It becomes us to rely upon God, to make a wise use of things present, to be armed against future events by a calm resignation to the divine will, and a stedfast belief of his promises, and a sense of the imperfection and uncertainty of worldly objects.

Future events, how near soever they may be, yet whilst they are future, are as it were at an immense distance, and we have no perspectives to view them through, to bring them close to us, and to make them fall under our observation. History informs us of persons in the highest stations, and of the greatest power, both in Pagan and in Christian nations, who being void of all religious principles and practices, were credulous with regard to magic arts, divination, and astrological predictions. Thus by a just judgment and a deserved infatuation, these wicked men, who did not believe in God, believed in the Devil, or rather, believed in knaves, in fools, and in madmen.

It is indeed lawful, and commendable also, to look as far before us, and to use the best precautions that we can; but an anxious concern about futurity, as it relates to this life, will only serve to torment our minds with uncertain hopes and imaginary fears, and may cause us to neglect present duties, and to leave the providence of God out of our thoughts, without whose favour and blessing no designs, how wisely soever projected and conducted, can prosper and take effect.

The last abuse of our love of knowledge, which I shall mention, is an impetuous desire of extending it to too many objects; which is the case of some persons who have had a liberal education. By such intemperate eagerness they are apt to grow impatient, and not to allow themselves time to make a strict inquiry, and procure all the evidence which the nature of the thing requires. They see a little, guess a great deal, and so hasten to the conclusion, and usually conclude wrong; and then pass on to the pursuit of something else. At this rate they have a confused notion of many things, and a solid knowledge of nothing. If truth were like some treasures, which though
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under ground, yet lie near the surface, these men might have a chance to find it; but if it be deep, and requires much digging, they will depart without it. Most errors arise from laziness, or rash judgments, or prejudice, or worldly interest, or some favourite passion. Proud and conceited persons, who imagine that they can see all the parts of a question at once, and penetrate all things with a glance, are prone to fall into many mistakes, and to despise and insult their betters. We should consider well, before we decide; and though we shall not pass on with swiftness in this sober method, we shall be in less danger of falling; whilst he who judgeth hastily, only increases his own ignorance.

Besides these ill consequences, an intemperate desire of knowledge, and sometimes of applause, or of profit, puts persons upon studies for which they have no genius, or capacity.

These are the several abuses of our natural inclination for knowledge, upon which I shall enlarge no farther, but conclude with one inference.

From these faculties and these desires of the human mind, we are certain that there is a

Maker and a Governor of the world. We find ourselves capable of thinking, and of knowing many things. Whence comes this faculty, and where doth it reside? It cannot be the result of matter and motion, which have no connection with reasoning; so that no Creed can be more inexplicable and unreasonable than the Atheist's Creed. Besides; Matter is not endued with a self-moving power; it must be impressed and determined by some cause. And what is that? Since matter cannot move or think by virtue of its own properties, there must be in us something distinct from our own body, which moves the body, which perceives, reasons, and remembers. Now our memory will carry us back but a little way, and consequently our thinking is neither ancient nor underived, but bestowed upon us by the first and supreme Cause, even God who possesseth all perfections. For he that planted the ear, shall not he hear? he that formed the eye, shall not he see? and he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? Our understanding therefore, dim as it is, will light us to him, who is the Father of lights, and the Author of every good gift,

S E R.

S E R M O N XIX.

PROVERBS XX. 12.

*The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath
made even both of them.*

RELIGION propounds two sorts of truths to our meditation. It contains truths which by our own natural abilities we never could have discovered, and which are purely matter of revelation. Such for example are the being and the offices of the Son, and of the Spirit of God, our redemption by the Son, and our sanctification by the Spirit, and a resurrection to life eternal promised to the penitent and obedient. These are Christian mysteries, or to speak more accurately and justly, these were mysteries, till the Gospel revealed and

unfolded them; for in the usual style of the Scriptures, a mystery is a doctrine not discoverable by human reason, and which consequently remained a mystery till God revealed it, and then ceased to be so; and of which, when it is propounded to us, we can by our own abilities know no more than what God hath revealed of it. Unto you it is given, saith our Lord to his disciples, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: and by their preaching and writing, the knowledge of these divine mysteries hath been conveyed down to us.

Besides these matters of mere revelation, Religion contains maxims clear in themselves, principles which are known or may be known by all men, and of which human Reason can discover the truth and the evidence. The first sort of truths, which I mentioned to you, Revelation brings to light and confirms: the second sort Revelation supposeth and takes for granted; and when it treats of them, it is not so much with a view to discover them, as to call them to our remembrance.

Amongst these latter truths I place the existence and the perfections of God, and his Providence which presides over the whole
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creation, and over the actions of men, together with the duties which flow from these principles. These truths and duties Revelation doth not, properly speaking, discover to us; it rather supposeth us acquainted with them. But because men would seldom meditate upon them as frequently as the subject deserves, and by heedlessness, dissipation, or worse causes, would lose sight of them, Revelation placeth them frequently before their eyes, and recommends them to their consideration, to save thoughtless persons from that dreadful danger into which their ignorance or their security would cast them. Such is the design of that excellent remark in the text;

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.

This is concise and simple; but the sense which it conveys to us is sublime and important; for by these few words the wise Man intended,

I. From the consideration of human nature, and of its noblest faculties, to incite us to the acknowledgment and adoration of God our creator and governor.

II. To remind us, from this knowledge of ourselves, to deduce practical inferences, and

remember the use which we ought to make of the powers and faculties bestowed upon us by the liberal hand of our Creator.

1. I observe, first, that Solomon's design is to lead us to the knowledge of our Creator by a short and compendious proof. There are beings; therefore there is a God. The consequence is plain; since there can be no effect without a cause; and no causes preceding one another, without a first Cause of all, which itself depends upon nothing. There are beings in which such regularity and contrivance appears, that we can ascribe them to nothing less than supreme Wisdom; therefore there is a God. Or in other words; there is a World; therefore there is a Deity.

This is a proof plain, obvious, visible, sensible, felt in all times and places; and which even Pagan ignorance and wickedness could not totally darken and obliterate. One inconvenience may seem to attend this proof; namely, that to comprehend the full force of it there is required an experience and a penetration which fall not to the share of mankind. To be sensible of its utmost strength, a man should be able to survey the visible works of God, and traverse the boundless space through

which they are diffused, and take an account of the different beings which compose this great Whole, and then consider their qualities, and then compare them together, and observe their mutual connections and proportions. This is too much for man to execute. Yet something of this kind he can perform. The wisdom of God in the creation is a proper subject to exercise his abilities, and to engage his attention; and it hath this pleasure and reward along with it, that the more we discern of the works of God, the more we shall admire and reverence the Artificer. But the bulk of mankind want a shorter and a more familiar proof than this, to lead them, as it were, by the hand a nearer way to their Creator. Out of the vast variety of sensible objects it is sufficient to select one, and to pitch upon that one creature which hath been called The little World, or an Epitome of the Creation; and that object is soon found; it is each of us; it is Man. This is Solomon's choice, and the proof which he gives us of a Deity: The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made both of them. What Moses said formerly to the Israelites, with regard to the law of God, may be said of this proof of the being
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of God; It is not hidden from thee; neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us? but it is very nigh thee. What our Saviour also said to the Pharisees concerning the kingdom of heaven, which was present with them, though it escaped their observation, may be said to mankind concerning God, Behold; he is within you. God is not far from any of us, says St. Paul, by which he meant, not only that God is present every where, but that all the objects which surround us, and even our own body and soul, are to us sensible proofs of a Deity.

It was an excellent Precept, and much admired of old by the Pagans, which was comprised in two words, *Know thyself*. It contains a variety of instruction, and I dare say that the person who first spake it, did not discern the whole extent of it, and all the uses to which it could be applied. It is a just censure of that idle industry and those frivolous inquiries in which many persons are occupied, whilst they neglect looking into themselves, and examin-
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ing their own conduct. It is also a precaution against the many faults which men daily commit, because they know not their own strength and their own weakness. But besides these uses of the above-mentioned Maxim, there is another sense of it, which the Pagans seem generally to have overlooked, and which Solomon sets before us, namely, that the knowledge of ourselves is a sure and ready method of arriving at the knowledge of God. If it were possible to persuade a thoughtless Libertine to be serious for a few hours, and engage his attention to a Lecture upon the human body; to shew him the contrivance of the whole structure; to point out to him the wisdom which is manifested in so many different organs, which a man employs continually, and often without premeditation or design; to enumerate to him those minute parts, of which not one is useless or superfluous, which assist each other perpetually, and of which not one can be hurt or removed without impairing or disfiguring the whole, more or less; to unfold to him that intricate machinery which composes the five Senses, who stand Centinels at their several posts, to give the soul timely notice of the things which
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tend to its good or to its hurt, and those animal spirits which flow with inconceivable rapidity and regularity to execute the designs of the will, and never fail to be ready for action.—Certainly, I say, if we could prevail with such a man to meditate on these things with any tolerable degree of attention and impartiality, he would be affected much as the Patriarch Jacob was with the miraculous vision which was presented to him in a dream. •He awakened out of his sleep, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not: and he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God. The body of man is a divine structure, it is the temple of God; though man too often makes it the temple of the Devil.

Amongst the beings of which the universe consists, and each of which proves a Deity, Solomon hath made choice of man, as affording the clearest proof of a Creator; and again, amongst all the parts of the human body, each of which separately viewed bears the impress of divine wisdom, he hath chosen the eye and the ear. Of all the senses, those of seeing and hearing seem to require the most complicated machinery, and to shew the art and the wisdom

dom of the maker to more advantage than the rest. But the proof of this observation would lead us too far into the province of Natural Philosophy, and is not suitable for the present occasion. I say therefore that seeing and hearing being confessedly the most noble of all the senses, do most clearly discover their almighty Author. For if you observe it, you will find that the other three senses, smelling, tasting, and feeling, are in a manner confined to bodily uses; but that seeing and hearing are the handmaids and ministring servants to thought, reason, and understanding, to morality and to religion, and that they are inlets by which the soul receives the sublimest and truest pleasures, and the most valuable advice and instruction.

Whilst the soul is lodged in the body, her notions would be confused and useless, if they were not improved by experience and reflection, to which the sight and the hearing are the most necessary helps. Faith is a Christian virtue, which we do not bring into the world with us; for as St. Paul says, Faith cometh by hearing. The idea of God, in some sense, may be said to be natural to us; not that it is born with us, but because our own existence
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and the things that furround us suggest it to us as soon as we make a right use of our reasoning faculties. Yet this notion would be soon lost or defaced, if it were not renewed and strengthened by what we see and hear. Solomon therefore, to excite in men a love and a reverence for their Creator and Preserver, sends them to the consideration of themselves, and chuses the two senses by the exercise of which man stands distinguished above the brute creation, as in the other three senses he is much upon the level with them. And since the seeing and the hearing serve the most manifestly to the glory of God, what is more natural than to infer that God is the author and giver of them? The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.

Thus we have a familiar and domestic proof of the being of God; but Solomon's maxim in the text contains more than this, and here lies the strength of it. The manner by which man sees external objects, and hears external sounds, is in reality so wonderful, so mysterious, so impenetrable, and yet so regular and exact, that it appears to be the contrivance of him whose works are past finding out.

Philosophy

Philosophy searches into the nature of things, and it makes noble discoveries in the structure of the body and the operations of the mind; but when we proceed farther to inquire how the soul and the body are united, and how the soul by the help of the eye perceives external objects, and by the help of the ear perceives external sounds, and whence the correspondence ariseth between the things without and the ideas within, here human knowledge is at a stand, the Wise and the Ignorant are here upon a level, and can give no other account of it than the will and the power of God who hath so appointed it. It is very fit that we should be able to know some things, and to discern some part of God's works, else we should not be able to prove his being; and it is equally fit that we should be unable to understand them thoroughly, that we may learn to think humbly of ourselves, and to adore the incomprehensible power and wisdom of our Creator.

These are such remarks as the text naturally suggests to us; but it seems to contain something farther, if we consider that the eye and the ear, being instruments of the understanding, may very well be taken for the understanding

standing itself. And here a proof is offered to us that there is a God, and that this God is our Father; since it is by our mind, our understanding, or our soul, that we may be said to be the image of God, and the sons of God. Indeed when man exerciseth his understanding upon the things which are hidden from him, and therefore concern him not, he finds himself to be a poor, short-sighted, ignorant creature. But when he turns it towards the things which he knows in part, and may know still better, he finds it to be of a considerable extent, and capable of perpetual improvement; and hence he learns that the Father of spirits, the supreme Intelligence, from whom he derives his powers and faculties, must needs be all-perfect. Though he cannot comprehend even himself, yet one thing he knows most certainly, that there is an Understanding beyond measure superior to his own; and thus the being of God is manifested by his works.

From the existence of God let us pass on to his providence, which is discovered to us by the same kind of proofs.

He who made all things must needs uphold all things. This is an evident consequence. He who made the eye and the ear, is he who
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during the whole course of our lives causeth that eye to see, and that ear to hear. The preservation of us and all other beings hath been called, and may not improperly be called, a continual creation, since in the nature of things no necessary connection appears between our being to-day and our being to-morrow. But there is not only a Providence which upholds and supports the material world; there is a Providence which beholds the actions of intelligent beings, which passeth an unerring judgment upon them, which approves or disapproves, which acquits or condemns. David thus describes it; He who made the ear, shall he not hear? and he who made the eye, shall he not see? Thus the Royal Prophet rebukes those wretches, who, to sin without fear or wit, persuaded themselves that the Lord did not see, and the God of Jacob did not regard. Even these men did not deny the being of God, but only his inspection over human affairs. The words of David, you see, are of the same import with those of Solomon in my text. The son and the father teach the same doctrine, and the Book of Proverbs is full of invective and indignation against the vile folly of those profligates, who behave them-

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during the whole course of our lives causeth that eye to see, and that ear to hear. The preservation of us and all other beings hath been called, and may not improperly be called, a continual creation, since in the nature of things no necessary connection appears between our being to-day and our being to-morrow. But there is not only a Providence which upholds and supports the material world; there is a Providence which beholds the actions of intelligent beings, which passeth an unerring judgment upon them, which approves or disapproves, which acquits or condemns. David thus describes it; He who made the ear, shall he not hear? and he who made the eye, shall he not see? Thus the Royal Prophet rebukes those wretches, who, to sin without fear or wit, persuaded themselves that the Lord did not see, and the God of Jacob did not regard. Even these men did not deny the being of God, but only his inspection over human affairs. The words of David, you see, are of the same import with those of Solomon in my text. The son and the father teach the same doctrine, and the Book of Proverbs is full of invective and indignation against the vile folly of those profligates, who behave them-

selves with as much licentious security as if there were no God, or no Providence. The reasoning of David in the Psalms, and of Solomon in the text, is one and the same; only David draws the consequence for you, and Solomon is more concise and sententious, and leaves you to draw it for yourself. He says, The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them. And what follows thence? It follows that God seeth all, and heareth all, and that nothing escapes his notice. Some ancient Philosophers, who went half-way over to Atheism, and their followers in these times, who pretending to be wise have shewed themselves to be fools, have fallen into an absurd and profane opinion, that God is indeed the maker of the world, but that he leaves men to go on in it as they think fit, without concerning himself about their sentiments, or meddling in their affairs, or being pleased or displeased with their conduct. Nothing can be more foolish than this notion, God hath made man, and placed him in this world, and furnished him with senses and understanding, that he may observe all that passeth about him, and turn every thing within his reach to his own profit and improvement, and

be always thinking, reasoning, contriving, and acting to some innocent, honest, and useful purpose. He hath given him ears to hear, and eyes to see; and can we suppose that God himself hath not the capacity and the right of seeing all, and hearing all, and judging of all? It is impossible that there should be any accomplishment in the creature, which the Creator doth not possess in the most complete and eminent manner; or any gift bestowed by him, of which he will not require an account from the possessor.

Not only doth God see all that passeth here below, but he sees all the objects in the world at one view, and in one instant. He beholds both those crimes which are committed in the face of the sun, and those which are veiled in the thickest darkness of the night. But the eye of the Lord penetrates beyond this. I told you that seeing and hearing, in Solomon's style, means the human understanding acting by those organs of sense. If God created the human mind, he sees through all its thoughts, all its windings and doublings, and inmost recesses; and the most profound dissimulation can no more conceal any project from him,

him, than if it were executed in the face of heaven and earth.

Such are the doctrines contained in the text.

II. Let us now proceed, secondly, to the moral and practical inferences which these truths suggest.

The first reflection that the text offers to every serious and attentive mind, is a sentiment of humble gratitude.

When an irreligious person surveys his own powers and faculties, and compares himself with others, the first thoughts which arise in his mind are usually thoughts of presumption, arrogance, and vanity.—He never reflects upon a maxim which holds true in the works of Nature, as well as in the works of Grace; What hast thou which thou hast not received? and if thou hast received, why dost thou boast? Pride and Poverty go ill together: therefore men should be reminded that the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them; that being struck with admiration at the gifts, and with gratitude towards the giver, and with a sense of their own weakness and dependence, they may

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say

say with the Psalmist, Lord, what is man, that thou visitest him; and the son of man, that thou regardest him!

But besides gratitude and humility towards God, Solomon's words seem designed to convey some particular instruction concerning man's duty to himself. For if you proceed to the verse immediately following the text, you will find that the lesson given in the text may have a regard to the lazy, stupid, unthinking person, who lives, or rather who dreams away his life in dissipation and indolence. Love not sleep, says he, lest thou come to poverty: open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread. This seems to be a reflection suggested by the text, and lets us know that God hath given men eyes and ears to engage them to honest industry and activity. In another place, Solomon gives the same lesson in a proverbial and sententious way; The wise man's eyes are in his head. An important lesson, this, and of a most extensive nature, whether you consider the variety of duties contained in it, or the multitude of persons whom it concerns, and who yet neglect it. This world is a great school, full

of examples and instructions, examples upon examples, and instructions upon instructions, speaking to our eyes and to our ears; and yet for six thousand years together thoughtless men have gone on, placed in the same circumstances, and committing the same faults one after another, regardless of the lessons which are continually presented to their observation, Nature in all her parts is a preacher of wisdom and righteousness. The common course of things proclaims the perfections of God; and the inconstancy of human affairs shews the present state to be a state of trial and of pilgrimage. Civil society is another school, a living school, full of living examples either of virtues worthy of imitation, or of vices the folly and misery of which is apparent and obvious. Besides these, there is another Preacher, an eloquent and an unwearied Preacher, who never ceaseth to warn and instruct; and that Preacher is Death. It is a Voice crying incessantly to us all. And what doth it say? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth. These are our Instructors; and yet except the wise, who are not the
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most numerous, and they themselves not always wise, may we not say of the children of men, what our Saviour said of the generation to which he was sent, that they have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not?

Man hath eyes and ears, therefore he ought to make use of them. He hath received them from God; therefore he ought to use them in the service of God. The soul is naturally active and busy, and as Solomon says elsewhere, The eye is never weary of seeing, nor the ear of hearing: but he adds, All this is vanity. Why so? because it is industry and activity ill employed. To use our faculties amiss is, in reality, not to use them. To listen to things that deserve not our attention, and to turn our eyes to objects that deserve not our regard, is the same thing as not to see, and not to hear. Therefore sinners, though so active in their own way, that they may be called, All eyes and all ears, yet in the style of the Scriptures are represented as deaf and blind, and even dead and buried. A just censure upon the men whose thoughts, views, and occupations are trifling, criminal, injurious to God, and contrary to his designs. Thus the Politician hath his eyes and his ears intent upon worldly events,

events, but too often to accommodate them to his own bad ends; the ingenious and learned man is ever meditating, inquiring, examining, but too often to gratify his own spleen, pride, and vanity; the worldly man is an example of vivacity and industry, but too often with a view to make every thing subservient to the ambition, avarice, and luxury which have the ascendent over him. But since God hath given these persons eyes, ears, understanding and abilities for other and better purposes, whatsoever excuse they make for themselves, and what names soever they may give to their irregularities, their behaviour is nothing but imprudence, blindness, stupidity, folly, and frenzy. The voice of unprejudiced Reason, and the eternal laws of equity, teach us that the just tribute and offering of our souls and bodies are due to that God from whom we have received them both. But when men have entered themselves into the service of sin, they are little affected by reasons of mere gratitude and decency. They must be told therefore that God is not only the Creator and the Preserver, but the just Judge, who will render to every one according to his deeds. It is true indeed, replies the Libertine, that God is the Author of our being,

being, and hath a right to our acknowledgments. But who can possibly keep a constant guard over his actions? And who can suppose that the supreme Being should be always observing and watching such poor creatures as we are, and offended at our little follies and deviations? Thus he says to himself: but this is all deceit and illusion. God sees all things at one view; and a wilful neglect of his righteous laws cannot be of small moment. It is to all men in general, to the libertine, to the hypocrite, to the careless, to the worldly-minded, and even to the sober and religious, who sometimes fall into great faults, it is, I say, to all these that the Eternal Wisdom crieth out, The seeing eye and the hearing ear, the Lord hath made even both of them. It is to Christians, in particular, that Wisdom thus addresseth herself, and adds to this advice that solemn and pathetic admonition, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*.

* This Discourse is taken, partly, from one of *L'Enfant*.

S E R M O N XX.

I TIM. i. 17.

Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.

IF there be any thing evident in nature, any thing discoverable by the human understanding, it is this, that the world was formed and is governed, not by blind Chance, or blind Necessity, but by Design; and that there is no accounting for the appearances of things without supposing a supreme and intelligent Cause, endued with perfect knowledge and perfect wisdom. For knowledge and wisdom, though nearly allied, seem to differ in this, that knowledge is a power or faculty, and wisdom is the
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proper exercise of it ; the former relating to speculation, the latter to practice. This distinction we are led to make by woful experience of our own selves. We have some portion both of knowledge and wisdom ; but of the two, we have more knowledge than wisdom ; and therefore it frequently happens that we know what is right, and do what is wrong.

Perfect knowledge always discerns the best end to which actions should be directed, always sees the means which will produce that end, and understands exactly how to apply these means to the accomplishing that effect ; and perfect wisdom hath always a right and invariable inclination or will to act accordingly.

That God must be perfectly wise, appears thus : God is the sole original cause and author of all. He knows what are the powers, qualities, and uses of every single thing, of every being, and what relation it bears to other things, and how all things may be placed, disposed, or altered, and what will be the effects and consequences resulting. He knows not only all the things which now are, or ever were, with the utmost exactness, even the most secret thoughts of intelligent beings, but also

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all things which shall be produced hereafter, either by necessary or by free causes. He is subject to no wrong inclination which can change his will, as he can experience no opposition which may withstand his power. It is plain therefore that he will always perform what in reason is fittest to be done.

Again, Every unwise action must of necessity proceed either from shortness of understanding, or from defect of power, or from faultiness of will. Either the person cannot tell, or cannot do, or will not do that which is best. But from each of these defects the perfection of the divine nature is infinitely removed. Therefore every action of God must needs be absolutely and in itself, and upon the whole, most wise.

From some or other of these defects, in some degree, or in some circumstances, no other being can be exempt. No other being therefore is supremely wise; but this perfection, as it is in God complete and absolute, so to him alone it is confined; and for this reason in the text, and in other places of Scripture, he is styled, The only wise God.

As to us, we may have very right intentions in many of our actions, and so far we are
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praise-worthy ; yet we may chuse means which are not quite fit to produce the desired ends, and we often must make a wrong choice, because our imperfect minds do not look through all the relations and connections of things, and cannot foresee future events, and so we must be, more or less, deficient in wisdom, although it may be without any fault in us in the moral sense. It is said in Scripture, in a very strong and emphatical manner, of the holy Angels, that God putteth no trust in them, and chargeth even them with folly ; with folly, that is, as it should seem, with imperfection. Their abilities, natural and moral, are far superior to ours, and yet not sufficient for the government of the world, which therefore God reserves entirely to himself, and only employs them to execute his orders, and not to contrive and direct things according to their own judgement, which though large is limited, and may be erroneous.

Another general argument to prove the perfect wisdom of God is taken from those imperfect images of it which are found in God's creatures, in us men. It is God alone who, as the Scripture speaks, hath put wisdom in the inward parts, and given understanding to the human

S E R M O N XX.

413

human heart. And this gift and ability, though very much limited in such Beings as we are, yet hath this most valuable quality belonging to it, that it is of a growing and improvable nature, enlarged by a good disposition, by serious attention, industrious inquiry, and careful observation, and may continue in an increasing state to all eternity. Yet as it is never possessed independently of God, so it can never approach to the infinity of the divine understanding. Our capacity to receive wisdom is derived from God; the means of cultivating it are under the direction of his providence; the success of our endeavours depends upon his good pleasure and his blessing; and the bounds with which it is circumscribed imply an imperfection from which the first Cause is free, whose excellences are incapable of addition, or diminution.

I proceed to consider the wisdom of God manifested in the constitution and government of the natural and moral world, and to contract this immense subject into as narrow a compass, as can possibly be done.

And here the question is, How can we in any manner judge of the ends and designs of God in all his works, so as to pronounce him perfectly

perfectly wise? and how shall we know what is or is not becoming the dignity of his nature? The answer is, that although the divine excellences infinitely surpass our narrow conceptions and confined understandings, and in God's works innumerable ends may be designed which lie quite out of our reach, and many appearances for which we cannot account, yet many things there are which we, as we are intelligent agents, may clearly perceive and prove to be worthy of any intelligent agent. When we see evident effects of goodness, we approve and admire them, and conclude that their author is good: when we see mutual connections and relations of things for the most useful purposes, we discern marks of contrivance and wisdom; and from these proofs we most reasonably conclude that perfect Wisdom and perfect Goodness governs the whole.

If we consider the works of God, and survey this stately fabric which he hath erected, we shall find that there is no portion of it in which the wisdom of the Creator doth not clearly and undeniably appear. In every part of the Creation the variety of things is greater, and the uses to which they serve are more numerous than the wisest and most inquisitive have ever been

been able to sum up ; so that all ages must acknowledge that these are objects for the most part beyond the reach of human industry and sagacity. Notwithstanding this, it is at the same time evident, even to a mean capacity, that through the wide-extended frame of Nature, every thing is under one Supreme Ruler, and every thing with unspeakable wisdom and foresight is adapted to the noblest purposes ; that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work ; and that day and night proclaim it in their turns, in a silent language, but a language easily understood by all who have in them any share of goodness, gratitude, and common sense.

And if from the world itself we turn our consideration more particularly upon man, the principal visible inhabitant whom God hath placed in it, and the numberless other creatures with which he hath filled it, one would think that no understanding could be so low, and no heart so depraved, as not to see that nothing less than perfect power and wisdom could have produced that astonishing variety of living creatures, each having its proper beauty, and its peculiar and singular use. And over all is placed man, appointed Lord of all, and

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made in the image of God. In the human body, the wisdom of God manifestly shines forth in the contrivance, order, symmetry, use, relation and dependence of so many different parts, not one of which could be spared, or otherwise placed, but to the great damage and deformity, if not destruction of the whole. But still more than in all these, more admirably, and in a more exalted manner appears the divine wisdom in the creation of the human soul, of a substance endued with those wonderful faculties of thinking, understanding, judging, reasoning, chusing, acting, and which is the end and excellency of all, capable of religious obedience, and having a power of knowing, imitating, honouring, and praising its Creator, and of perceiving that it is impossible to praise him duly and sufficiently; for one part, and a considerable part of gratitude and adoration, is to feel and acknowledge that, at the best, it is and needs must be defective.

It is farther to be observed that the divine operations in the natural and material world are so contrived, that an infinite number of effects depend upon very few causes, upon a few simple, uniform, general laws of nature.

And nothing is more grand and beautiful than the greatest variety produced by the greatest simplicity. Thus the vast visible system of heaven and earth, and this planetary world, is upheld by a motion first impressed upon it by its Author, and by gravitation, or attraction, or a tendency of all bodies to each other, and to a common centre. And this simple cause cannot be explained without having recourse to God's power and will, who either by himself immediately, or by some spiritual agent under his direction, acts constantly and invariably upon every part of matter, and wisely guides what we commonly call the course of nature. To this noble discovery of this one principle of gravitation are owing the prodigious modern improvements in natural philosophy; and what makes them the more valuable is, that they are all applicable to moral and religious purposes, afford the fullest proof of the being of God, and the sublimest notions of his perfections.

Let us next consider the manifestation of this wisdom of God in his government of the moral world.

The manner in which God conducts creatures endued with understanding freedom and

immortality ; the way in which he affifts, or restrains, or excites them, and forefees their future conduct, without any neceffity imposed upon them, or any breach of their liberty ; the reasons why he permits fo much evil in the world, and the good which may result even from that evil ; the whole plan of his government comprehending all creatures, and extending through all eternity ; this is something too great for our understanding to grasp, and too difficult for our abilities to clear up. It is not reasonable that we fhould make a pofitive judgment of it from a few events in fome fmall portions of fpace and time. Yet if we confider the hiftory of Providence, even in all the fingle parts of it, we fhall find fufficient marks of wifdom to convince us, that the difpofition of the whole is infinitely wifer than can now be conceived. The more we know of it hereafter, the more we fhall admire it ; but in all probability neither we upon earth, nor the fpirits of juft men made perfect, nor the higheft Angels can comprehend the whole fyftem of providence, becaufe finite cannot contain infinite ; fo that there may be something in it to exercife the faith and humility of the moft exalted creature in heaven.

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The Laws by which God governs the rational world are reducible to two; first, the Law of Reason, or Natural Religion; secondly, the Law of Revelation, or Christianity; I say Christianity, because the Gospel may be considered as the complete revelation of God's will and purposes, which all prior revelations had in view, and in which they all center and terminate; so that Christianity, in one sense, is as old as mankind.

Before the heaven and the earth were made, before time and the world, the Law of natural religion, like other eternal Truths, existed in the Divine understanding and prescience; and as soon as any rational creatures were formed, this Law began to operate and to be in force, requiring of every creature the performance of a duty to God, to other beings, and to itself.

This Law of Nature is the primary and original law of God, the eternal and unchangeable law of morality, which necessarily arises from the nature of rational creatures, and from their relation to God and to each other. And so the wisdom of this law is the very same as the wisdom of God's creation itself. For God hath so made us, that if we would behave ourselves towards him and towards one another

according to our power and abilities, according to the best of our judgment, to the dictates of sober reason, and the suggestions of conscience, universal harmony and all its blessed effects would ensue.

In the Laws of Natural Religion we may observe the same character of simplicity which is so conspicuous in the material world. The virtue and the happiness of intelligent creatures is the great end for which they are created. And to this purpose the wise author of nature hath implanted in us all two principles which tend to produce this effect ; and they are self-affection and benevolence. Self-affection, like the impulsive force which gave motion to the material world, is impressed upon the human mind, and causes it to be always seeking and pursuing its own welfare ; and benevolence attracts free and rational agents to each other, and forms civil society, just as the force of gravitation unites material beings into a regular and connected system.

It is obvious here to observe and to object that of these two principles implanted in us, namely, self-affection and benevolence, the former often fails of producing good effects, and the latter is not sufficiently predominant
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in mankind; for self-affection is so blind as frequently to pursue its own detriment, and benevolence is so weak in many persons as to be hardly discernible in their behaviour. This is too true; but we are speaking of men, and not of brutes; and if men will so brutalize themselves as to lose all moral discernment, taste and feeling, they are not to be ranked in the class of rational agents. God doth not govern the moral world, as he rules the natural world, by irresistible impulse. In the natural world there is no opposition to his will. He appointed the moon for certain seasons, and the sun knoweth his going down. The planetary system he hath made fast for ever and ever; he hath given it a law which shall not be broken. But the irregularities and deviations of human creatures, are the result of liberty and free agency, without which there could be no such thing as either virtue or vice, and which, like other good gifts, is liable to be abused.

The last and great manifestation of the wisdom of God is the Gospel, that full and final revelation of the will of God by Jesus Christ, upon account of which Christ is styled the Wisdom of God, in whom are repositied all

the treasures of divine wisdom, and who was foretold and promised from the beginning of world.

When our first parent disobeyed his Creator, and fell into sin, he became obnoxious to death; and if death had been to him an annihilation, an utter extinction, or a removal from this state to a worse, it would have seemed a very severe punishment for one offence of a frail, weak and fallible creature, which was rather owing to heedless indiscretion than to stubborn malice. Therefore God did not totally cast him off, but gave him intimations and hope of a restitution, and also bestowed upon him length of days, that by repentance and renewed obedience he might qualify himself for a future and an happier state.

The light of nature, and the tradition of a divine revelation in Paradise, were sufficient guides to the posterity of Adam for some time. And afterwards the Patriarchs, and then the Jews, were placed under God's particular government and protection, to be a perpetual testimony against atheism and idolatry, and to recommend true religion to all nations. The numerous rites and ceremonies of the Jewish dispensation were wisely designed to keep that

people from going after false Gods worshiped by the neighbouring nations; and these rites were at the same time both representations of moral purity, and figures of Christ, the Messiah, who was foretold by the Prophets, and by whose coming the wisdom of God was most conspicuously manifested, life and immortality were brought to light, and it appeared that all the various scenes of Providence, from first to last, should at the final judgment terminate in a just retribution to every single person according to his deserts.

Many and most important are the ends and designs of God, manifested in the Gospel.

One was to unfold to us the doctrine of redemption; to accomplish which, it pleased God to send into the world his only Son, who condescending to take our nature upon him, became, what no man besides him ever was or will be, one who never offended in thought, word, or deed, who performed the exactest obedience to the will of his Father, who submitted to afflictions, indignities, and a cruel death, and thus became qualified to exercise the sublime and merciful office of a Redeemer, and a Mediator between God and man. For all mankind, without exception, he procured a
release

release from death by a resurrection. But this resurrection was to be beneficial or detrimental to them, according to their past conduct, and to the use which they had made of the state in which they had been placed, and of the degrees of knowledge and ability that had been imparted to them. To his faithful servants he promised a distinguished place in that part of his Father's numerous mansions, which is called, The kingdom of heaven, that where he is, there they should be also.

That men cannot otherways become happy than by the practice of virtue, and that sinners cannot become capable of pardon without forsaking their iniquities, is evident both from reason, and from all former revelations of the divine will. But by the Gospel the wisdom of God hath in a more illustrious manner, and with a greater weight of arguments, set forth the indispensable necessity of repentance and amendment, and the impossibility of obtaining pardon without it. In this very revelation of mercy and love, we are commanded not to trust to faith without works, but to walk worthy of our vocation, and as it becomes the children of light.

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Natural religion would teach men to hope that God was placable, and would accept repentance ; but it was a strong additional assurance of it which the wisdom of God vouchsafed to us by the Gospel. With humility and reliance the penitent may draw near to the throne of grace, since Christ hath opened to us the heavenly temple by his death and resurrection, and ever continues to intercede for us. That we might live worthy of these privileges, he hath given us in the Gospel a perfect rule of morality, and in his own life a bright example of every virtue ; that we might not want motives to engage us to follow his steps, he hath made us a clear discovery of a judgment to come ; that we might not want strength to resist temptations, he hath promised us a sufficient assistance in time of need ; and because it was fit that a doctrine which was to be an universal law and rule of life, which was to be the condition of salvation to persons of all capacities, should be level to their understandings, therefore he hath delivered it to us with plainness and simplicity, teaching us to live religiously, in expectation of being judged according to our works. And he is to be our judge, who himself put on mortality,

talities, and endured temptations, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Plainness and simplicity, I say, are the characters of the Gospel, if we consider it in itself, and set aside the unintelligible or unreasonable doctrines, and the arbitrary decisions with which the Christian Scribes and Pharisees have adulterated it.

The wisdom of God caused this Gospel to prevail by unlikely instruments, by the preaching of mean and unlearned persons, in opposition to all human power and human wisdom; he chose, as the Apostle says, the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that were mighty, to give a manifest proof that it was his work, and not the work of man.

Christianity, notwithstanding the many faults of its professors, hath made a great alteration for the better in the nations which have embraced it, in their laws, and in their manners and sentiments; it hath exterminated many of the vile practices of the Pagans, and civilised many rude and barbarous nations.

Christ hath been a Light to lighten the world, not only in religion and morality, but
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in human learning also, in the arts and sciences, upon which the welfare of civil society so much depends. It may easily be proved that all the learning that is in the world is entirely owing to Christianity and to Christian writers. The knowledge of the learned languages, those keys of erudition, the knowledge of the laws of nations, and of the laws of war and peace, of Chronology, History, Natural and Moral Philosophy, the preservation of ancient books, and the illustration of them, critical and philological learning, all these things are owing to the study, the sagacity and industry of Christians.

If the Gospel had never been revealed, or had been stifled in its infancy, the world would have been sunk in the lowest barbarity and ignorance, ignorance of God, and of religion, and of every thing that is valuable.

In this nation of ours we have had since the beginning of the last century, a few Deistical and Atheistical writers of some name and note. Let us ask one fair question; Have these men been shining lights in their generation? Have they made considerable discoveries? Have they stood foremost in the Republic of Letters? Have they enlarged the bounds of Science?

No.

No. We may defy the whole party to name one amongst them, who hath deserved the character of an eminent Scholar or Philosopher. But we can name many Christians who have had greater abilities and more useful knowledge than all these men and all their admirers put together.

To conclude; we should continually praise God for all his works of wisdom and goodness; we should apply ourselves to our own plain duty, and be persuaded that the secret designs of Providence will appear in the end to have been most wisely conducted. In afflictions we should patiently submit, considering that the divine wisdom knows best what is best for us. In all difficulties we should rely upon God, whose superintendence extends even to the smallest things, and who much more will take care of us. We should endeavour to imitate him in his perfections, and to be wise, as our heavenly Father is wise. Now human wisdom is not to be estimated by bright parts and uncommon abilities, which when misemployed are mere weakness and folly in the moral sense. He who steadily pursues his own true final felicity, and together with it the greatest public good, he is a wise man; he who acts upon
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lower and narrower views doth not merit that character. Let us then set a due value upon wisdom, and diligently seek it, and entirely love it, always bearing this in our minds, that The fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

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